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II

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THE ORDEAL OF RICHARD FEVEREL

A HISTORY OF A FATHER AND SON

VOLUME

II

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THE ORDEAL OF RICHARD FEVEREL

CHAPTER XXIX

In which the Last Act of a Comedy takes the place of the First

Although it blew hard when Cæsar crossed the Rubicon, the passage of that river is commonly calm; calm as Acheron. So long as he gets his fare, the ferryman does not need to be told whom he carries: he pulls with a will, and heroes may be over in half an hour. Only when they stand on the opposite bank, do they see what a leap they have taken. The shores they have relinquished shrink to an infinite remoteness. There they have dreamed: here they must act. There lie youth and irresolution: here manhood and purpose. They are veritably in another land: a moral Acheron divides their life. Their memories scarce seem their own! The 'Philosophical Geography' (about to be published) observes that each man has, one time or other, a little Rubicon—a clear or a foul water to cross. It is asked him: 'Wilt thou wed this Fate, and give up all behind thee?' And 'I will,' firmly pronounced, speeds him over. The above-named manuscript authority informs us, that by far the greater number of carcases rolled by this heroic flood to its sister stream below, are those of fellows who have repented their pledge, and have tried to swim back to the bank they

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have blotted out. For though every man of us may be a hero for one fatal minute, very few remain so after a day's march even: and who wonders that Madam Fate is indignant, and wears the features of the terrible Universal Fate to him? Fail before her, either in heart or in act, and lo, how the alluring loves in her visage wither and sicken to what it is modelled on! Be your Rubicon big or small, clear or foul, it is the same: you shall not return. On—or to Acheron!—I subscribe to that saying of 'The Pilgrim's Scrip':

'The danger of a little knowledge of things is disputable: *but beware the little knowledge of one's self!*'

Richard Feverel was now crossing the River of his Ordeal. Already the mists were stealing over the land he had left: his life was cut in two, and he breathed but the air that met his nostrils. His father, his father's love, his boyhood and ambition, were shadowy. His poetic dreams had taken a living attainable shape. He had a distincter impression of the Autumnal Berry and her household than of anything at Raynham. And yet the young man loved his father, loved his home: and I dare say Cæsar loved Rome: but whether he did or no, Cæsar when he killed the Republic was quite bald, and the hero we are dealing with is scarce beginning to feel his despotic moustache. Did he know what he was made of? Doubtless, nothing at all. But honest passion has an instinct that can be safer than conscious wisdom. He was an arrow drawn to the head, flying from the bow. His audacious mendacities and subterfuges did not strike him as in any way criminal; for he was perfectly sure that the winning and securing of Lucy would in the end be boisterously approved of, and in that case, were not the means

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justified? Not that he took trouble to argue thus, as older heroes and self-convicting villains are in the habit of doing, to deduce a clear conscience. Conscience and Lucy went together.

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It was a soft fair day. The Rubicon sparkled in the morning sun. One of those days when London embraces the prospect of summer, and troops forth all its babies. The pavement, the squares, the parks, were early alive with the cries of young Britain. Violet and primrose girls, and organ boys with military monkeys, and systematic bands very determined in tone if not in tune, filled the atmosphere, and crowned the blazing procession of omnibuses, freighted with business men, Cityward, where a column of reddish brown smoke,—blown aloft by the South-west, marked the scene of conflict to which these persistent warriors repaired. Richard had seen much of early London that morning. His plans were laid. He had taken care to ensure his personal liberty against accidents, by leaving his hotel and his injured uncle Hippias at sunrise. To-day or to-morrow his father was to arrive. Farmer Blaize, Tom Bakewell reported to him, was raging in town. Another day and she might be torn from him: but to-day this miracle of creation would be his, and then from those glittering banks yonder, let them summon him to surrender her who dared! The position of things looked so propitious that he naturally thought the powers waiting on love conspired in his behalf. And she, too—since she must cross this river, she had sworn to him to be brave, and do him honour, and wear the true gladness of her heart in her face. Without a suspicion of folly in his acts, or fear of results, Richard strolled into Kensington Gardens,

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breakfasting on the foreshadow of his great joy, now with a vision of his bride, now of the new life opening to him. Mountain masses of clouds, rounded in sunlight, swung up the blue. The flowering chestnut pavilions overhead rustled and hummed. A sound in his ears as of a banner unfolding in the joyful distance lulled him.

He was to meet his bride at the church at a quarter past eleven. His watch said a quarter to ten. He strolled on beneath the long-stemmed trees toward the well dedicated to a saint obscure. Some people were drinking at the well. A florid lady stood by a younger one, who had a little silver mug half-way to her mouth, and evinced undisguised dislike to the liquor of the salutary saint.

'Drink, child!' said the maturer lady. 'That is only your second mug. I insist upon your drinking three full ones every morning we're in town. Your constitution positively requires iron!'

'But, mama,' the other expostulated, 'it's so nasty. I shall be sick.'

'Drink!' was the harsh injunction. 'Nothing to the German waters, my dear. Here, let me taste.' She took the mug and gave it a flying kiss. 'I declare I think it almost nice—not at all objectionable. Pray, taste it,' she said to a gentleman standing below them to act as cup-bearer.

An unmistakable cis-Rubicon voice replied: 'Certainly, if it's good fellowship; though I confess I don't think mutual sickness a very engaging ceremony.'

Can one never escape from one's relatives? Richard ejaculated inwardly.

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Without a doubt those people were Mrs. Doria, Clare, and Adrian. He had them under his eyes.

Clare, peeping up from her constitutional dose to make sure no man was near to see the possible consequence of it, was the first to perceive him. Her hand dropped.

'Now, pray, drink, and do not fuss!' said Mrs. Doria.

'Mama!' Clare gasped.

Richard came forward and capitulated honourably, since retreat was out of the question. Mrs. Doria swam to meet him: 'My own boy! My dear Richard!' profuse of exclamations. Clare shyly greeted him. Adrian kept in the background.

'Why, we were coming for you to-day, Richard,' said Mrs. Doria, smiling effusion; and rattled on, 'We want another cavalier. This is delightful! My dear nephew! You have grown from a boy to a man. And there's down on his lip! And what brings you here at such an hour in the morning? Poetry, I suppose! Here, take my arm, child.—Clare! finish that mug and thank your cousin for sparing you the third. I always bring her, when we are by a chalybeate, to take the waters before breakfast. We have to get up at unearthly hours. Think, my dear boy! Mothers are sacrifices! And so you've been alone a fortnight with your agreeable uncle! A charming time of it you must have had! Poor Hippias! what may be his last nostrum?'

'Nephew!' Adrian stretched his head round to the couple. 'Doses of nephew taken morning and night fourteen days! And he guarantees that it shall destroy an iron constitution in a month.'

Richard mechanically shook Adrian's hand as he spoke.

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'Quite well, Ricky?'

'Yes: well enough,' Richard answered.

'Well?' resumed his vigorous aunt, walking on with him, while Clare and Adrian followed. 'I really never saw you looking so handsome. There's something about your face—look at me—you needn't blush. You've grown to an Apollo. That blue buttoned-up frock coat becomes you admirably—and those gloves, and that easy neck-tie. Your style is irreproachable, quite a style of your own! And nothing eccentric. You have the instinct of dress. Dress shows blood, my dear boy, as much as anything else. Boy!—you see, I can't forget old habits. You were a boy when I left, and now!—Do you see any change in him, Clare?' she turned half round to her daughter.

'Richard is looking very well, mama,' said Clare, glancing at him under her eyelids.

'I wish I could say the same of you, my dear.—Take my arm, Richard. Are you afraid of your aunt? I want to get used to you. Won't it be pleasant, our being all in town together in the season? How fresh the Opera will be to you! Austin, I hear, takes stalls. You can come to the Foreys' box when you like. We are staying with the Foreys close by here. I think it's a little too far out, you know; but they like the neighbourhood. This is what I have always said: Give him more liberty! Austin has seen it at last. How do you think Clare looking?'

The question had to be repeated. Richard surveyed his cousin hastily, and praised her looks.

'Pale!' Mrs. Doria sighed.

'Rather pale, aunt.'

'Grown very much—don't you think, Richard?'

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'Very tall girl indeed, aunt.'

'If she had but a little more colour, my dear Richard! I'm sure I give her all the iron she can swallow, but that pallor still continues. I think she does not prosper away from her old companion. She was accustomed to look up to you, Richard——'

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'Did you get Ralph's letter, aunt?' Richard interrupted her.

'Absurd!' Mrs. Doria pressed his arm. 'The nonsense of a boy! Why did you undertake to forward such stuff?'

'I'm certain he loves her,' said Richard, in a serious way.

The maternal eyes narrowed on him. 'Life, my dear Richard, is a game of cross-purposes,' she observed, dropping her fluency, and was rather angered to hear him laugh. He excused himself by saying that she spoke so like his father.

'You breakfast with us,' she freshened off again. 'The Foreys wish to see you; the girls are dying to know you. Do you know, you have a reputation on account of that'—she crushed an intruding adjective—'System you were brought up on. You mustn't mind it. For my part, I think you look a credit to it. Don't be bashful with young women, mind! As much as you please with the old ones. You know how to behave among men. There you have your Drawing-room Guide! I'm sure I shall be proud of you. Am I not?'

Mrs. Doria addressed his eyes coaxingly.

A benevolent idea struck Richard, that he might employ the minutes to spare, in pleading the case of poor Ralph; and, as he was drawn along, he pulled

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out his watch to note the precise number of minutes he could dedicate to this charitable office.

'Pardon me,' said Mrs. Doria. 'You want manners, my dear boy. I think it never happened to me before that a man consulted his watch in my presence.'

Richard mildly replied that he had an engagement at a particular hour, up to which he was her servant.

'Fiddlededee!' the vivacious lady sang. 'Now I've got you, I mean to keep you. Oh! I've heard all about you. This ridiculous indifference that your father makes so much of! Why, of course, you wanted to see the world! A strong healthy young man shut up all his life in a lonely house—no friends, no society, no amusements but those of rustics! Of course you were indifferent! Your intelligence and superior mind alone saved you from becoming a dissipated country boor.—Where are the others?'

Clare and Adrian came up at a quick pace.

'My damozel dropped something,' Adrian explained.

Her mother asked what it was.

'Nothing, mama,' said Clare demurely, and they proceeded as before.

Overborne by his aunt's fluency of tongue, and occupied in acute calculation of the flying minutes, Richard let many pass before he edged in a word for Ralph. When he did, Mrs. Doria stopped him immediately.

'I must tell you, child, that I refuse to listen to such rank idiotcy.'

'It's nothing of the kind, aunt.'

'The fancy of a boy.'

'He's not a boy. He's half a year older than I am!'

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'You silly child! The moment you fall in love, you all think yourselves men.'

'On my honour, aunt! I believe he loves her thoroughly.'

'Did he tell you so, child?'

'Men don't speak openly of those things,' said Richard.

'Boys do,' said Mrs. Doria.

'But listen to me in earnest, aunt. I want you to be kind to Ralph. Don't drive him to—You may be sorry for it. Let him—do let him write to her, and see her. I believe women are as cruel as men in these things.'

'I never encourage absurdity, Richard.'

'What objection have you to Ralph, aunt?'

'Oh, they're both good families. It's not that absurdity, Richard. It will be to his credit to remember that his first fancy wasn't a dairymaid.' Mrs. Doria pitched her accent tellingly. It did not touch her nephew.

'Don't you want Clare ever to marry?' He put the last point of reason to her.

Mrs. Doria laughed. 'I hope so, child. We must find some comfortable old gentleman for her.'

'What infamy!' mutters Richard.

'And I engage Ralph shall be ready to dance at her wedding, or eat a hearty breakfast—We don't dance at weddings now, and very properly. It's a horrid sad business, not to be treated with levity.—Is that his regiment?' she said, as they passed out of the hussar-sentinelled gardens. 'Tush, tush, child! Master Ralph will recover, as—hem! others have done. A little headache—you call it heartache—and up you rise

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again, looking better than ever. No doubt, to have a grain of sense forced into your brains, you poor dear children! must be painful. Girls suffer as much as boys, I assure you. More, for their heads are weaker, and their appetites less constant. Do I talk like your father now? Whatever makes the boy fidget at his watch so?'

Richard stopped short. Time spoke urgently.

'I must go,' he said.

His face did not seem good for trifling. Mrs. Doria would trifle in spite.

'Listen, Clare! Richard is going. He says he has an engagement. What possible engagement can a young man have at eleven o'clock in the morning?—unless it's to be married!' Mrs. Doria laughed at the ingenuity of her suggestion.

'Is the church handy, Ricky!' said Adrian. 'You can still give us half an hour if it is. The celibate hours strike at Twelve.' And he also laughed in his fashion.

'Won't you stay with us, Richard?' Clare asked. She blushed timidly, and her voice shook.

Something indefinite—a sharp-edged thrill in the tones made the burning bridegroom speak gently to her.

'Indeed, I would, Clare; I should like to please you, but I have a most imperative appointment—that is, I promised—I must go. I shall see you again——'

Mrs. Doria took forcible possession of him. 'Now, do come, and don't waste words. I insist upon your having some breakfast first, and then, if you really must go, you shall. Look! there's the house. At least you will accompany your aunt to the door.'

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Richard conceded this. She little imagined what she required of him. Two of his golden minutes melted into nothingness. They were growing to be jewels of price, one by one more and more precious as they ran, and now so costly-rare—rich as his blood! not to kindest relations, dearest friends, could he give another. The die is cast! Ferryman! push off.

'Good-bye!' he cried, nodding bluffly at the three as one, and fled.

They watched his abrupt muscular stride through the grounds of the house. He looked like resolution on the march. Mrs. Doria, as usual with her out of her brother's hearing, began rating the System.

'See what becomes of that nonsensical education! The boy really does not know how to behave like a common mortal. He has some paltry appointment, or is mad after some ridiculous idea of his own, and everything must be sacrificed to it! That's what Austin calls concentration of the faculties. I think it's more likely to lead to downright insanity than to greatness of any kind. And so I shall tell Austin. It's time he should be spoken to seriously about him.'

'He's an engine, my dear aunt,' said Adrian. 'He isn't a boy, or a man, but an engine. And he appears to have been at high pressure since he came to town—out all day and half the night.'

'He's mad!' Mrs. Doria interjected.

'Not at all. Extremely shrewd is Master Ricky, and carries as open an eye ahead of him as the ships before Troy. He's more than a match for any of us. He is for me, I confess.'

'Then,' said Mrs. Doria, 'he does astonish me!'

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Adrian begged her to retain her astonishment till the right season, which would not be long arriving.

Their common wisdom counselled them not to tell the Foreys of their hopeful relative's ungracious behaviour. Clare had left them. When Mrs. Doria went to her room her daughter was there, gazing down at something in her hand, which she guiltily closed.

In answer to an inquiry why she had not gone to take off her things, Clare said she was not hungry. Mrs. Doria lamented the obstinacy of a constitution that no quantity of iron could affect, and eclipsed the looking-glass, saying: 'Take them off here, child, and learn to assist yourself.'

She disentangled her bonnet from the array of her spreading hair, talking of Richard, and his handsome appearance, and extraordinary conduct. Clare kept opening and shutting her hand, in an attitude half pensive, half listless. She did not stir to undress. A joyless dimple hung in one pale cheek, and she drew long even breaths.

Mrs. Doria, assured by the glass that she was ready to show, came to her daughter.

'Now, really,' she said, 'you are too helpless, my dear. You cannot do a thing without a dozen women at your elbow. What will become of you? You will have to marry a millionaire.—What's the matter with you, child?'

Clare undid her tight-shut fingers, as if to some attraction of her eyes, and displayed a small gold hoop on the palm of a green glove.

'A wedding-ring!' exclaimed Mrs. Doria, inspecting the curiosity most daintily.

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There on Clare's pale green glove lay a wedding-ring!

Rapid questions as to where, when, how, it was found, beset Clare, who replied: 'In the Gardens, mama. This morning. When I was walking behind Richard.'

'Are you sure he did not give it you, Clare?'

'Oh no, mama! he did not give it me.'

'Of course not! only he does such absurd things! I thought, perhaps—these boys are so exceedingly ridiculous!' Mrs. Doria had an idea that it might have been concerted between the two young gentlemen, Richard and Ralph, that the former should present this token of hymenæal devotion from the latter to the young lady of his love; but a moment's reflection exonerated boys even from such preposterous behaviour.

'Now, I wonder,' she speculated on Clare's cold face, 'I do wonder whether it's lucky to find a wedding-ring? What very quick eyes you have, my darling!' Mrs. Doria kissed her. She thought it must be lucky, and the circumstance made her feel tender to her child. Her child did not move to the kiss.

'Let's see whether it fits,' said Mrs. Doria, almost infantine with surprise and pleasure.

Clare suffered her glove to be drawn off. The ring slid down her long thin finger, and settled comfortably.

'It does!' Mrs. Doria whispered. To find a wedding-ring is open to any woman; but to find a wedding-ring that fits may well cause a superstitious emotion. Moreover, that it should be found while walking in the neighbourhood of the identical youth whom a mother

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has destined for her daughter, gives significance to the gentle perturbation of ideas consequent on such a hint from Fortune.

'It really fits!' she pursued. 'Now I never pay any attention to the nonsense of omens and that kind of thing' (had the ring been a horseshoe Mrs. Doria would have picked it up and dragged it obediently home), 'but this, I must say, is odd—to find a ring that fits!—singular! It never happened to me. Sixpence is the most I ever discovered, and I have it now. Mind you keep it, Clare—this ring. And,' she laughed, 'offer it to Richard when he comes; say, you think he must have dropped it.'

The dimple in Clare's cheek quivered.

Mother and daughter had never spoken explicitly of Richard. Mrs. Doria, by exquisite management, had contrived to be sure that on one side there would be no obstacle to her project of general happiness, without, as she thought, compromising her daughter's feelings unnecessarily. It could do no harm to an obedient young girl to hear that there was no youth in the world like a certain youth. He the prince of his generation, she might softly consent, when requested, to be his princess; and if never requested (for Mrs. Doria envisaged failure), she might easily transfer her softness to squires of lower degree. Clare had always been blindly obedient to her mother (Adrian called them Mrs. Doria Battledoria and the fair Shuttlecockiana), and her mother accepted in this blind obedience the text of her entire character. It is difficult for those who think very earnestly for their children to know when their children are thinking on their own account. The exercise of their volition we

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construe as revolt. Our love does not like to be invalided and deposed from its command, and here I think yonder old thrush on the lawn who has just kicked the last of her lank offspring out of the nest to go shift for itself, much the kinder of the two, though sentimental people do shrug their shoulders at these unsentimental acts of the creatures who never wander from nature. Now, excess of obedience is, to one who manages most exquisitely, as bad as insurrection. Happily Mrs. Doria saw nothing in her daughter's manner save a want of iron. Her pallor, her lassitude, the tremulous nerves in her face, exhibited an imperious requirement of the mineral.

'The reason why men and women are mysterious to us, and prove disappointing,' we learn from 'The Pilgrim's Scrip,' 'is, that we will read them from our own book; just as we are perplexed by reading ourselves from theirs.'

Mrs. Doria read her daughter from her own book, and she was gay; she laughed with Adrian at the breakfast-table, and mock-seriously joined in his jocose assertion that Clare was positively and by all hymenæal auspices betrothed to the owner of that ring, be he who he may, and must, whenever he should choose to come and claim her, give her hand to him (for everybody agreed the owner must be masculine, as no *woman* would drop a wedding-ring), and follow him whither he listed all the world over. Amiable giggling Forey girls called Clare, The Betrothed. Dark man, or fair? was mooted. Adrian threw off the first strophe of Clare's fortune in burlesque rhymes, with an insinuating gypsy twang. Her Aunt Forey warned her to have her dresses in readiness. Her Grandpapa

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Forey pretended to grumble at bridal presents being expected from grandpapas. This one smelt orange-flower, another spoke solemnly of an old shoe. The finding of a wedding-ring was celebrated through all the palpitating accessories and rosy ceremonies involved by that famous instrument. In the midst of the general hilarity, Clare showed her deplorable want of iron by bursting into tears.

Did the poor mocked-at heart divine what might be then enacting? Perhaps, dimly, as we say: that is, without eyes.

At an altar stand two fair young creatures, ready with their oaths. They are asked to fix all time to the moment, and they do so. If there is hesitation at the immense undertaking, it is but maidenly. She conceives as little mental doubt of the sanity of the act as he. Over them hangs a cool young curate in his raiment of office. Behind are two apparently lucid people, distinguished from each other by sex and age: the foremost a bunch of simmering black satin; under her shadow a cock-robin in the dress of a gentleman, big joy swelling out his chest, and pert satisfaction cocking his head. These be they who stand here in place of parents to the young couple. All is well. The service proceeds.

Firmly the bridegroom tells forth his words. This hour of the complacent giant at least is his, and that he means to hold him bound through the eternities, men may hear. Clearly, and with brave modesty, speaks she: no less firmly, though her body trembles: her voice just vibrating while the tone travels on, like a smitten vase.

Time hears sentence pronounced on him: the frail

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hands bind his huge limbs and lock the chains. He is used to it: he lets them do as they will.

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Then comes that period when they are to give their troth to each other. The Man with his right hand takes the Woman by her right hand: the Woman with her right hand takes the Man by his right hand.—Devils dare not laugh at whom Angels crowd to contemplate.

Their hands are joined: their blood flows as one stream. Adam and fair Eve front the generations. Are they not lovely? Purer fountains of life were never in two bosoms.

And then they loose their hands, and the cool curate doth bid the Man to put a ring on the Woman's fourth finger, counting thumb. And the Man thrusts his hand into one pocket, and into another, forward and back many times: into all his pockets. He remembers that he felt for it, and felt it in his waistcoat pocket, when in the Gardens. And his hand comes forth empty. And the Man is ghastly to look at!

Yet, though Angels smile, shall not Devils laugh! The curate deliberates. The black-satin bunch ceases to simmer. He in her shadow changes from a beaming cock-robin to an inquisitive sparrow. Eyes multiply questions: lips have no reply. Time ominously shakes his chain, and in the pause a sound of mockery stings their ears.

Think ye a hero is one to be defeated in his first battle? Look at the clock! there are but seven minutes to the stroke of the celibate hours: the veteran is surely lifting his two hands to deliver fire, and his shot will sunder them in twain so nearly united. All the jewellers of London speeding down

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In which the Last Act of a Comedy takes the place of the First

with sacks full of the nuptial circlet cannot save them!

The battle must be won on the field, and what does the hero now? It is an inspiration! For who else would dream of such a reserve in the rear? None see what he does; only that the black-satin bunch is remonstratingly agitated, stormily shaken, and subdued: and as though the menacing cloud had opened, and dropped the dear token from the skies at his demand, he produces the symbol of their consent, and the service proceeds: 'With this ring I thee wed.'

They are prayed over and blest. For good, or for ill, this deed is done. The names are registered; fees fly right and left: they thank, and salute, the curate, whose official coolness melts into a smile of monastic gallantry: the beadle on the steps waves off a gaping world as they issue forth: bridegroom and bridesman recklessly scatter gold on him: carriage-doors are banged to: the coachmen drive off, and the scene closes, everybody happy.

CHAPTER XXX

Celebrates the Breakfast

And the next moment the bride is weeping as if she would dissolve to one of Dian's Virgin Fountains from the clasp of the Sun-God. She has nobly preserved the mask imposed by comedies, till the curtain has fallen, and now she weeps, streams with tears. Have patience, O impetuous young man! It is your profession to be a hero. This poor heart is new to it,

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and her duties involve such wild acts, such brigandage, such terrors and tasks, she is quite unnerved. She did you honour till now. Bear with her now. She does not cry the cry of ordinary maidens in like cases. While the struggle went on her tender face was brave; but, alas! Omens are against her: she holds an ever-present dreadful one on that fatal fourth finger of hers, which has coiled itself round her dream of delight, and takes her in its clutch like a horrid serpent. And yet she must love it. She dares not part from it. She must love and hug it, and feed on its strange honey, and all the bliss it gives her casts all the deeper shadow on what is to come.

Say: Is it not enough to cause feminine apprehension, for a woman to be married in another woman's ring?

You are amazons, ladies, at Saragossa, and a thousand citadels—wherever there is strife, and Time is to be taken by the throat. Then shall few men match your sublime fury. But what if you see a vulture, visible only to yourselves, hovering over the house you are gaily led by the torch to inhabit? Will you not crouch and be cowards?

As for the hero, in the hour of victory he pays no heed to omens. He does his best to win his darling to confidence by caresses. Is she not his? Is he not hers? And why, when the battle is won, does she weep? Does she regret what she has done?

Oh, never! never! her soft blue eyes assure him, stedfast love seen swimming on clear depths of faith in them, through the shower.

He is silenced by her exceeding beauty, and sits perplexed waiting for the shower to pass.

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Alone with Mrs. Berry, in her bedroom, Lucy gave tongue to her distress, and a second character in the comedy changed her face.

'O Mrs. Berry! Mrs. Berry! what has happened! what has happened!'

'My darlin' child!' The Bridal Berry gazed at the finger of doleful joy. 'I'd forgot all about it! And that's what've made me feel so queer ever since, then! I've been seemin' as if I wasn't myself somehow, without my ring. Dear! dear! what a wilful young gentleman! We ain't a match for men in that state—Lord help us!'

Mrs. Berry sat on the edge of a chair: Lucy on the edge of the bed.

'What do you think of it, Mrs. Berry? Is it not terrible?'

'I can't say I should 'a liked it myself, my dear,' Mrs. Berry candidly responded.

'Oh! why, why, why did it happen!' the young bride bent to a flood of fresh tears, murmuring that she felt already old—forsaken.

'Haven't you got a comfort in your religion for all accidents?' Mrs. Berry inquired.

'None for this. I know it's wrong to cry when I am so happy. I hope he will forgive me.'

Mrs. Berry vowed her bride was the sweetest, softest, beautifulest thing in life.

'I'll cry no more,' said Lucy. 'Leave me, Mrs. Berry, and come back when I ring.'

She drew forth a little silver cross, and fell upon her knees to the bed. Mrs. Berry left the room tiptoe.

When she was called to return, Lucy was calm and tearless, and smiled kindly to her.

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'It's over now,' she said.

Mrs. Berry sedately looked for her ring to follow.

'He does not wish me to go in to the breakfast you have prepared, Mrs. Berry. I beg to be excused. I cannot eat.'

Mrs. Berry very much deplored it, as she had laid out a superior nuptial breakfast, but with her mind on her ring she nodded assentingly.

'We shall not have much packing to do, Mrs. Berry.'

'No, my dear. It's pretty well all done.'

'We are going to the Isle of Wight, Mrs. Berry.'

'And a very suitable spot ye've chose, my dear!'

'He loves the sea. He wishes to be near it.'

'Don't ye cross to-night, if it's anyways rough, my dear. It isn't adviseable.' Mrs. Berry sank her voice to say, 'Don't ye be soft and give way to him there, or you'll both be repenting it.'

Lucy had only been staving off the unpleasantness she had to speak. She saw Mrs. Berry's eyes pursuing her ring, and screwed up her courage at last.

'Mrs. Berry.'

'Yes, my dear.'

'Mrs. Berry, you shall have another ring.'

'Another, my dear?' Berry did not comprehend. 'One's quite enough for the objeck,' she remarked.

'I mean,' Lucy touched her fourth finger, 'I cannot part with this.' She looked straight at Mrs. Berry.

That bewildered creature gazed at her, and at the ring, till she had thoroughly exhausted the meaning of the words, and then exclaimed, horror-struck: 'Deary me, now! you don't say that? You're to be married again in your own religion.'

The young wife repeated: 'I can never part with it.'

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'But, my dear!' the wretched Berry wrung her hands, divided between compassion and a sense of injury. 'My dear!' she kept expostulating like a mute.

'I know all that you would say, Mrs. Berry. I am very grieved to pain you. It is mine now, and must be mine. I cannot give it back.'

There she sat, suddenly developed to the most inflexible little heroine in the three Kingdoms.

From her first perception of the meaning of the young bride's words, Mrs. Berry, a shrewd physiognomist, knew that her case was hopeless, unless she treated her as she herself had been treated, and seized the ring by force of arms; and that she had not heart for.

'What!' she gasped faintly, 'one's own lawful wedding ring you wouldn't give back to a body?'

'Because it is mine, Mrs. Berry. It was yours, but it is mine now. You shall have whatever you ask for but that. Pray, forgive me! It must be so.'

Mrs. Berry rocked on her chair, and sounded her hands together. It amazed her that this soft little creature could be thus firm. She tried argument.

'Don't ye know, my dear, it's the fatalest thing you're inflictin' upon me, reelly! Don't ye know that bein' bereft of one's own lawful wedding-ring's the fatalest thing in life, and there's no prosperity after it! For what stands in place o' that, when that's gone, my dear? And what *could* ye give me to compensate a body for the loss o' that? Don't ye know—Oh, deary me!' The little bride's face was so set that poor Berry wailed off in despair.

'I know it,' said Lucy. 'I know it all. I know what I do to you. Dear, dear Mrs. Berry! forgive me! If I parted with my ring I know it would be fatal.'

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So this fair young freebooter took possession of her argument as well as her ring.

Berry racked her distracted wits for a further appeal.

'But, my child,' she counterargued, 'you don't understand. It ain't as you think. It ain't a hurt to you now. Not a bit, it ain't. It makes no difference now! Any ring does while the wearer's a maid. And your Mr. Richard'll find the very ring he intended for ye. And, of course, that's the one you'll wear as his wife. It's all the same now, my dear. It's no shame to a maid. Now do—now do—there's a darlin'!'

Wheedling availed as little as argument.

'Mrs. Berry,' said Lucy, 'you know what my—he spoke: "With this ring I thee wed." It was with *this* ring. Then how could it be with another?'

Berry was constrained despondently to acknowledge that was logic.

She hit upon an artful conjecture:

'Won't it be unlucky you're wearin' of the ring which served me so? Think o' that!'

'It may! it may! it may!' cried Lucy.

'And arn't you rushin' into it, my dear?'

'Mrs. Berry,' Lucy said again, 'it was this ring. It cannot—it never can be another. It was this. What it brings me I must bear. I shall wear it till I die!'

'Then what am *I* to do?' the ill-used woman groaned. 'What shall I tell my husband when he come back to me, and see I've got a new ring waitin' for him? Won't that be a welcome?'

Quoth Lucy: 'How can he know it is not the same, in a plain gold ring?'

'You never see so keen a eyed man in joolry as my Berry!' returned his solitary spouse. 'Not know, my

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dear? Why, any one would know that 've got eyes in his head. There 's as much difference in wedding-rings as there 's in wedding people! Now, do pray be reasonable, my own sweet!'

'Pray, do not ask me,' pleads Lucy.

'Pray, do think better of it,' urges Berry.

'Pray, pray, Mrs. Berry!' pleads Lucy.

'—And not leave your old Berry all forlorn just when you 're so happy!'

'Indeed I would not, you dear, kind old creature!' Lucy faltered.

Mrs. Berry thought she had her.

'Just when you 're going to be the happiest wife on earth—all you want yours!' she pursued the tender strain. 'A handsome young gentleman! Love and Fortune smilin' on ye!——'

Lucy rose up.

'Mrs. Berry,' she said, 'I think we must not lose time in getting ready, or he will be impatient.'

Poor Berry surveyed her in abject wonder from the edge of her chair. Dignity and resolve were in the ductile form she had hitherto folded under her wing. In an hour the heroine had risen to the measure of the hero. Without being exactly aware what creature she was dealing with, Berry acknowledged to herself it was not one of the common run, and sighed, and submitted.

'It 's like a divorce, that it is!' she sobbed.

After putting the corners of her apron to her eyes, Berry bustled humbly about the packing. Then Lucy, whose heart was full to her, came and kissed her, and Berry bumped down and regularly cried. This over, she had recourse to fatalism.

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'I suppose it was to be, my dear! It's my punishment for meddlin' wi' such matters. No, I'm not sorry. Bless ye both. Who'd 'a thought you was so wilful?—you that any one might have taken for one of the silly-softs! You're a pair, my dear! indeed you are! You was made to meet! But we mustn't show him we've been crying.—Men don't like it when they're happy. Let's wash our faces and try to bear our lot.'

So saying the black-satin bunch careened to a renewed deluge. She deserved some sympathy, for if it is sad to be married in another person's ring, how much sadder to have one's own old accustomed lawful ring violently torn off one's finger and eternally severed from one! But where you have heroes and heroines, these terrible complications ensue.

They had now both fought their battle of the ring, and with equal honour and success.

In the chamber of banquet Richard was giving Ripton his last directions. Though it was a private wedding, Mrs. Berry had prepared a sumptuous breakfast. Chickens offered their breasts: pies hinted savoury secrets: things mystic, in a mash, with Gallic appellatives, jellies, creams, fruits, strewed the table: as a tower in the midst, the cake colossal: the priestly vesture of its nuptial white relieved by hymenæal splendours.

Many hours, much labour and anxiety of mind, Mrs. Berry had expended upon this breakfast, and why? There is one who comes to all feasts that have their basis in Folly, whom criminals of trained instinct are careful to provide against: who will speak, and whose hateful voice must somehow be silenced while the

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feast is going on. This personage is THE PHILOSOPHER. Mrs. Berry knew him. She knew that he would come. She provided against him in the manner she thought most efficacious: that is, by cheating her eyes and intoxicating her conscience with the due and proper glories incident to weddings where fathers dilate, mothers collapse, and marriage settlements are flourished on high by the family lawyer: and had there been no show of the kind to greet her on her return from the church, she would, and she foresaw she would, have stared at squalor and emptiness, and repented her work. The Philosopher would have laid hold of her by the ear, and called her bad names. Entrenched behind a breakfast-table so legitimately adorned, Mrs. Berry defied him. In the presence of that cake he dared not speak above a whisper. And there were wines to drown him in, should he still think of protesting; fiery wines and cool: claret sent purposely by the bridegroom for the delectation of his friend.

For one good hour, therefore, the labour of many hours kept him dumb. Ripton was fortifying himself so as to forget him altogether, and the world as well, till the next morning. Ripton was excited, overdone with delight. He had already finished one bottle, and listened, pleasantly flushed, to his emphatic and more abstemious chief. He had nothing to do but to listen, and to drink. The hero would not allow him to shout Victory! or hear a word of toasts; and as, from the quantity of oil poured on it, his eloquence was becoming a natural force in his bosom, the poor fellow was afflicted with a sort of elephantiasis of suppressed emotion. At times he half rose from his chair, and

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fell vacuously into it again; or he chuckled in the face of weighty, severely-worded instructions; tapped his chest, stretched his arms, yawned, and in short behaved so singularly that Richard observed it, and said: 'On my soul, I don't think you know a word I'm saying.'

'Every word, Ricky!' Ripton spirted through the opening. 'I'm going down to your governor, and tell him: Sir Austin! Here's your only chance of being a happy father—no, no!—Oh! don't you fear me, Ricky! I shall talk the old gentleman over.'

His chief said: 'Look here. You had better not go down to-night. Go down the first thing to-morrow, by the six o'clock train. Give him my letter. Listen to me—give him my letter, and don't speak a word till he speaks. His eyebrows will go up and down, he won't say much. I know him. If he asks you about her, don't be a fool, but say what you think of her sensibly——'

No cork could hold in Ripton when she was alluded to. He shouted: 'She's an angel!'

Richard checked him: 'Speak sensibly, I say—quietly. You can say how gentle and good she is—my fleur-de-luce! And say, this was not her doing. If any one's to blame, it's I. I made her marry me. Then go to Lady Blandish, if you don't find her at the house. You may say whatever you please to her. Give her my letter, and tell her I want to hear from her immediately. She has seen Lucy, and I know what she thinks of her. You will then go to Farmer Blaize. I told you Lucy happens to be his niece—she has not lived long there. She lived with her Aunt Desborough in France while she was a child, and can

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hardly be called a relative to the farmer—there's not a point of likeness between them. Poor darling! she never knew her mother. Go to Mr. Blaize, and tell him. You will treat him just as you would treat any other gentleman. If you are civil, he is sure to be. And if he abuses me, for my sake and hers you will still treat him with respect. You hear? And then write me a full account of all that has been said and done. You will have my address the day after to-morrow. By the way, Tom will be here this afternoon. Write out for him where to call on you the day after to-morrow, in case you have heard anything in the morning you think I ought to know at once, as Tom will join me that night. Don't mention to anybody about my losing the ring, Ripton. I wouldn't have Adrian get hold of that for a thousand pounds. How on earth I came to lose it! How well she bore it, Rip! How beautifully she behaved!'

Ripton again shouted: 'An angel!' Throwing up the heels of his second bottle, he said—

'You may trust your friend, Richard. Aha! when you pulled at old Mrs. Berry I didn't know what was up. I do wish you'd let me drink her health?'

'Here's to Penelope!' said Richard, just wetting his mouth. The carriage was at the door: a couple of dire organs, each grinding the same tune, and a vulture-scented itinerant band (from which not the secretest veiled wedding can escape) worked harmoniously without in the production of discord, and the noise acting on his nervous state made him begin to fume and send in messages for his bride by the maid.

By and by the lovely young bride presented herself dressed for her journey, and smiling from stained eyes.

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Mrs. Berry was requested to drink some wine, which Ripton poured out for her, enabling Mrs. Berry thereby to measure his condition.

The bride now kissed Mrs. Berry, and Mrs. Berry kissed the bridegroom, on the plea of her softness. Lucy gave Ripton her hand, with a musical 'Good-bye, Mr. Thompson,' and her extreme graciousness made him just sensible enough to sit down before he murmured his fervent hopes for her happiness.

'I shall take good care of him,' said Mrs. Berry, focussing her eyes to the comprehension of the company.

'Farewell, Penelope!' cried Richard. 'I shall tell the police everywhere to look out for your lord.'

'Oh my dears! good-bye, and Heaven bless ye both!' Berry quavered, touched with compunction at the thoughts of approaching loneliness. Ripton, his mouth drawn like a bow to his ears, brought up the rear to the carriage, receiving a fair slap on the cheek from an old shoe precipitated by Mrs. Berry's enthusiastic female domestic.

White handkerchiefs were waved, the adieux had fallen to signs: they were off. Then did a thought of such urgency illumine Mrs. Berry, that she telegraphed, hand in air, awakening Ripton's lungs, for the coachman to stop, and ran back to the house. Richard chafed to be gone, but at his bride's intercession he consented to wait. Presently they beheld the old black-satin bunch stream through the street-door, down the bit of garden, and up the astonished street, halting, panting, capless at the carriage door, a book in her hand,—a much-used, dog-leaved, steamy, greasy book, which, at the same time calling out in breathless jerks,

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'There! never ye mind looks! I ain't got a new one. Read it, and don't ye forget it!' she discharged into Lucy's lap, and retreated to the railings, a signal for the coachman to drive away for good.

How Richard laughed at the Berry's bridal gift! Lucy, too, lost the omen at her heart as she glanced at the title of the volume. It was Dr. Kitchener on Domestic Cookery!

CHAPTER XXXI

The Philosopher appears in Person

General withdrawing of heads from street-windows, emigration of organs and bands, and a relaxed atmosphere in the circle of Mrs. Berry's abode, proved that Dan Cupid had veritably flown to suck the life of fresh regions. With a pensive mind she grasped Ripton's arm to regulate his steps, and returned to the room where her creditor awaited her. In the interval he had stormed her undefended fortress, the cake, from which altitude he shook a dolorous head at the guilty woman. She smoothed her excited apron, sighing. Let no one imagine that she regretted her complicity. She was ready to cry torrents, but there must be absolute castigation before this criminal shall conceive the sense of regret; and probably then she will cling to her wickedness the more—such is the born Pagan's tenacity! Mrs. Berry sighed, and gave him back his shake of the head. O you wanton, improvident creature! said he. O you very wise old gentleman! said she. He asked her the thing she had been doing. She enlightened him with the fatalist's reply. He

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sounded a bogey's alarm of contingent grave results. She retreated to the entrenched camp of the fact she had helped to make. 'It's done!' she exclaimed. How could she regret what she felt comfort to know was done? Convinced that events alone could stamp a mark on such stubborn flesh, he determined to wait for them, and crouched silent on the cake, with one finger downwards at Ripton's incision there, showing a crumbling chasm and gloomy rich recess.

The eloquent indication was understood. 'Dear! dear!' cried Mrs. Berry, 'what a heap o' cake, and no one to send it to!'

Ripton had resumed his seat by the table and his embrace of the claret. Clear ideas of satisfaction had left him and resolved to a boiling geysir of indistinguishable transports. He bubbled, and waggled, and nodded amicably to nothing, and successfully, though not without effort, preserved his uppermost member from the seductions of the nymph, Gravitation, who was on the look-out for his whole length shortly.

'Ha! ha!' he shouted, about a minute after Mrs. Berry had spoken, and almost abandoned himself to the nymph on the spot. Mrs. Berry's words had just reached his wits.

'Why do you laugh, young man?' she inquired, familiar and motherly on account of his condition.

Ripton laughed louder, and caught his chest on the edge of the table and his nose on a chicken. 'That's goo'!' he said, recovering, and rocking under Mrs. Berry's eyes. 'No friend!'

'I did not say, no friend,' she remarked. 'I said, no one; meanin', I know not where for to send it to.'

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Ripton's response to this was: 'You put a Griffin on that cake. Wheatsheaves each side.'

'His crest?' Mrs. Berry said sweetly.

'Oldest baronetcy 'n England!' waved Ripton.

'Yes?' Mrs. Berry encouraged him on.

'You think he's Richards. We're oblige' be very close. And she's the most lovely!—If I hear man say thing 'gainst her . . . If I hear man say thing 'gainst her. . . .'

'You needn't for to cry over her, young man,' said Mrs. Berry. 'I wanted for to drink their right healths by their right names, and then go about my day's work, and I do hope you won't keep me.'

Ripton stood bolt upright at her words.

'You do?' he said, and filling a bumper he with cheerfully vinous articulation and glibness of tongue proposed the health of Richard and Lucy Feverel, of Raynham Abbey! and that mankind should not require an expeditious example of the way to accept the inspiring toast, he drained his bumper at a gulp. It finished him. The farthing rushlight of his reason leapt and expired. He tumbled to the sofa and there stretched.

Some minutes subsequent to Ripton's signalization of his devotion to the bridal pair, Mrs. Berry's maid entered the room to say that a gentleman was inquiring below after the young gentlemen who had departed, and found her mistress with a tottering wineglass in her hand, exhibiting every symptom of unconsoled hysterics. Her mouth gaped, as if the fell creditor had her by the swallow. She ejaculated with horrible exultation that she had been and done it, as her disastrous aspect seemed to testify, and her evident, but

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inexplicable, access of misery induced the sympathetic maid to tender those caressing words that were all Mrs. Berry wanted to go off into the self-caressing fit without delay; and she had already given the preluding demoniac ironic outburst, when the maid called heaven to witness that the gentleman would hear her; upon which Mrs. Berry violently controlled her bosom, and ordered that he should be shown upstairs instantly to see her the wretch she was. She repeated the injunction.

The maid did as she was told, and Mrs. Berry, wishing first to see herself as she was, mutely accosted the looking-glass, and tried to look a very little better. She dropped a shawl on Ripton and was settled, smoothing her agitation when her visitor was announced.

The gentleman was Adrian Harley. An interview with Tom Bakewell had put him on the track, and now a momentary survey of the table, and its white-vestured cake, made him whistle.

Mrs. Berry plaintively begged him to do her the favour to be seated.

'A fine morning, ma'am,' said Adrian.

'It have been!' Mrs. Berry answered, glancing over her shoulder at the window, and gulping as if to get her heart down from her mouth.

'A very fine Spring,' pursued Adrian, calmly anatomizing her countenance.

Mrs. Berry smothered an adjective to 'weather' on a deep sigh. Her wretchedness was palpable. In proportion to it, Adrian waxed cheerful and brisk. He divined enough of the business to see that there was some strange intelligence to be fished out of the culprit

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CHAPTER XXXI
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who sat compressing hysterics before him; and as he was never more in his element than when he had a sinner, and a repentant prostrate abject sinner, in hand, his affable countenance might well deceive poor Berry.

'I presume these are Mr. Thompson's lodgings?' he remarked, with a look at the table.

Mrs. Berry's head and the whites of her eyes informed him that they were not Mr. Thompson's lodgings.

'No?' said Adrian, and threw a carelessly inquisitive eye about him. 'Mr. Feverel is out, I suppose?'

A convulsive start at the name, and two corroborating hands dropped on her keees, formed Mrs. Berry's reply.

'Mr. Feverel's man,' continued Adrian, 'told me I should be certain to find him here. I thought he would be with his friend, Mr. Thompson. I'm too late, I perceive. Their entertainment is over. I fancy you have been having a party of them here, ma'am?—a bachelors' breakfast!'

In the presence of that cake this observation seemed to mask an irony so shrewd that Mrs. Berry could barely contain herself. She felt she must speak. Making her face as deplorably propitiating as she could, she began:

'Sir, may I beg for to know your name?'

Mr. Harley accorded her request.

Groaning in the clutch of a pitiless truth, she continued:

'And you are Mr. Harley, that was—oh! and you 've come for Mr.——?'

Mr. Richard Feverel was the gentleman Mr. Harley had come for.

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'Oh! and it's no mistake, and he's of Raynham Abbey?' Mrs. Berry inquired.

Adrian, very much amused, assured her that he was born and bred there.

'His father's Sir Austin?' wailed the black-satin bunch from behind her handkerchief.

Adrian verified Richard's descent.

'Oh, then, what have I been and done!' she cried, and stared blankly at her visitor. 'I been and married my baby! I been and married the bread out of my own mouth. O Mr. Harley! Mr. Harley! I knew you when you was a boy that big, and wore jackets; and all of you. And it's my softness that's my ruin, for I never can resist a man's asking. Look at that cake, Mr. Harley!'

Adrian followed her directions quite coolly. 'Wedding-cake, ma'am!' he said.

'Bride-cake it is, Mr. Harley!'

'Did you make it yourself, ma'am?'

The quiet ease of the question overwhelmed Mrs. Berry, and upset that train of symbolic representations by which she was seeking to make him guess the catastrophe and spare her the furnace of confession.

'I did not make it myself, Mr. Harley,' she replied. 'It's a bought cake, and I'm a lost woman. Little I dreamed when I had him in my arms a baby that I should some day be marrying him out of my own house! I little dreamed that! Oh, why did he come to me! Don't you remember his old nurse, when he was a baby in arms, that went away so sudden, and no fault of hers, Mr. Harley! The very mornin' after the night you got into Mr. Benson's cellar, and got so tipsy on his Madeary — I remember it as clear

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CHAPTER XXXI
The Philosopher appears in Person

as yesterday! — and Mr. Benson was that angry he threated to use the whip to you, and I helped put you to bed. I'm that very woman.'

Adrian smiled placidly at these reminiscences of his guileless youthful life.

'Well, ma'am! well?' he said. He would bring her to the furnace.

'Won't you see it all, kind sir?' Mrs. Berry appealed to him in pathetic dumb show.

Doubtless by this time Adrian did see it all, and was mentally cursing at Folly, and reckoning the immediate consequences, but he looked uninstructed, his peculiar dimple-smile was undisturbed, his comfortable full-bodied posture was the same. 'Well, ma'am?' he spurred her on.

Mrs. Berry burst forth: 'It were done this mornin', Mr. Harley, in the church, at half-past eleven of the clock, or twenty to, by licence.'

Adrian was now obliged to comprehend a case of matrimony. 'Oh!' he said, like one who is as hard as facts, and as little to be moved: 'Somebody was married this morning; was it Mr. Thompson, or Mr. Feverel?'

Mrs. Berry shuffled up to Ripton, and removed the shawl from him, saying: 'Do he look like a new married bridegroom, Mr. Harley?'

Adrian inspected the oblivious Ripton with philosophic gravity.

'This young gentleman was at church this morning?' he asked.

'Oh! quite reasonable and proper then,' Mrs. Berry begged him to understand.

'Of course, ma'am.' Adrian lifted and let fall the

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stupid inanimate limbs of the gone wretch, puckering his mouth queerly. 'You were all reasonable and proper, ma'am. The principal male performer, then, is my cousin, Mr. Feverel? He was married by you, this morning, by licence at your parish church, and came here, and ate a hearty breakfast, and left intoxicated.'

Mrs. Berry flew out. 'He never drink a drop, sir. A more moderate young gentleman you never see. Oh! don't ye think that now, Mr. Harley. He was as upright and master of his mind as you be.'

'Ay!' the wise youth nodded thanks to her for the comparison, 'I mean the other form of intoxication.'

Mrs. Berry sighed. She could say nothing on that score.

Adrian desired her to sit down, and compose herself, and tell him circumstantially what had been done.

She obeyed, in utter perplexity at his perfectly composed demeanour.

Mrs. Berry, as her recital declared, was no other than that identical woman who once in old days had dared to behold the baronet behind his mask, and had ever since lived in exile from the Raynham world on a little pension regularly paid to her as an indemnity. She was that woman, and the thought of it made her almost accuse Providence for the betraying excess of softness it had endowed her with. How was she to recognize her baby grown a man? He came in a feigned name; not a word of the family was mentioned. He came like an ordinary mortal, though she felt something more than ordinary to him—she knew she did. He came bringing a beautiful young lady, and on what grounds could she turn her back on them? Why, seeing that all was chaste and legal, why *should* she

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CHAPTER XXXI
The Philosopher appears in Person

interfere to make them unhappy—so few the chances of happiness in this world! Mrs. Berry related the seizure of her ring.

'One wrench,' said the sobbing culprit, 'one, and my ring was off!'

She had no suspicions, and the task of writing her name in the vestry-book had been too exacting for a thought upon the other signatures.

'I dare say you were exceedingly sorry for what you had done,' said Adrian.

'Indeed, sir,' moaned Berry, 'I were, and am.'

'And would do your best to rectify the mischief—eh, ma'am?'

'Indeed, and indeed, sir, I would,' she protested solemnly.

'—As, of course, you should—knowing the family. Where may these lunatics have gone to spend the Moon?'

Mrs. Berry swimmingly replied: 'To the Isle ——. I don't quite know, sir!' she snapped the indication short, and jumped out of the pit she had fallen into. Repentant as she might be, those dears should not be pursued and cruelly balked of their young bliss! 'To-morrow, if you please, Mr. Harley: not to-day!'

'A pleasant spot,' Adrian observed, smiling at his easy prey.

By a measurement of dates he discovered that the bridegroom had brought his bride to the house on the day he had quitted Raynham, and this was enough to satisfy Adrian's mind that there had been concoction and chicanery. Chance, probably, had brought him to the old woman: chance certainly had not brought him to the young one.

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'Very well, ma'am,' he said, in answer to her petitions for his favourable offices with Sir Austin in behalf of her little pension and the bridal pair, 'I will tell him you were only a blind agent in the affair, being naturally soft, and that you trust he will bless the consummation. He will be in town to-morrow morning; but one of you two must see him to-night. An emetic kindly administered will set our friend here on his legs. A bath, and a clean shirt, and he might go. I don't see why your name should appear at all. Brush him up, and send him to Bellingham by the seven o'clock train. He will find his way to Raynham; he knows the neighbourhood best in the dark. Let him go and state the case. Remember, one of you must go.'

With this fair prospect of leaving a choice of a perdition between the couple of unfortunates, for them to fight and lose all their virtues over, Adrian said, 'Good-morning.'

Mrs. Berry touchingly arrested him. 'You won't refuse a piece of his cake, Mr. Harley?'

'Oh, dear no, ma'am.' Adrian turned to the cake with alacrity. 'I shall claim a very large piece. Richard has a great many friends who will rejoice to eat his wedding-cake. Cut me a fair quarter, Mrs. Berry. Put it in paper, if you please. I shall be delighted to carry it to them, and apportion it equitably according to their several degrees of relationship.'

Mrs. Berry cut the cake. Somehow, as she sliced through it, the sweetness and hapless innocence of the bride was presented to her, and she launched into eulogies of Lucy, and clearly showed how little she regretted her conduct. She vowed that they seemed

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made for each other; that both were beautiful; both had spirit; both were innocent; and to part them, or make them unhappy, would be, Mrs. Berry wrought herself to cry aloud, oh, such a pity!

Adrian listened to it as the expression of a matter-of-fact opinion. He took the huge quarter of cake, nodded multitudinous promises, and left Mrs. Berry to bless his good heart.

'So dies the System!' was Adrian's comment in the street. 'And now let prophets roar! He dies respectably in a marriage-bed, which is more than I should have foretold of the monster. Meantime,' he gave the cake a dramatic tap, 'I'll go sow nightmares.'

CHAPTER XXXII

Procession of the Cake

Adrian really bore the news he had heard with creditable disinterestedness, and admirable repression of anything beneath the dignity of a philosopher. When one has attained that felicitous point of wisdom from which one sees all mankind to be fools, the diminutive objects may make what new moves they please, one does not marvel at them: their sedateness is as comical as their frolic, and their frenzies more comical still. On this intellectual eminence the wise youth had built his castle, and he had lived in it from an early period. Astonishment never shook the foundations, nor did envy of greater heights tempt him to relinquish the security of his stronghold, for he saw none. Jugglers he saw running up ladders that over-

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topped him, and air-balloons scaling the empyrean; but the former came precipitately down again, and the latter were at the mercy of the winds; while he remained tranquil on his solid unambitious ground, fitting his morality to the laws, his conscience to his morality, his comfort to his conscience. Not that voluntarily he cut himself off from his fellows: on the contrary, his sole amusement was their society. Alone he was rather dull, as a man who beholds but one thing must naturally be. Study of the animated varieties of that one thing excited him sufficiently to think life a pleasant play; and the faculties he had forfeited to hold his elevated position he could serenely enjoy by contemplation of them in others. Thus:—wonder at Master Richard's madness: though he himself did not experience it, he was eager to mark the effect on his beloved relatives. As he carried along his vindictive hunch of cake, he shaped out their different attitudes of amaze, bewilderment, horror; passing by some personal chagrin in the prospect. For his patron had projected a journey, commencing with Paris, culminating on the Alps, and lapsing in Rome: a delightful journey to show Richard the highways of History and tear him from the risk of further ignoble fascinations, that his spirit might be altogether bathed in freshness and revived. This had been planned during Richard's absence to surpise him.

Now the dream of travel was to Adrian what the love of woman is to the race of young men. It supplanted that foolishness. It was his Romance, as we say; that buoyant anticipation on which in youth we ride the airs, and which, as we wax older and too heavy for our atmosphere, hardens to the Hobby, which, if an obstinate

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CHAPTER XXXII Procession of the Cake

animal, is a safer horse, and conducts man at a slower pace to the sexton. Adrian had never travelled. He was aware that his romance was earthly and had discomforts only to be evaded by the one potent talisman possessed by his patron. His Alp would hardly be grand to him without an obsequious landlord in the foreground: he must recline on Mammon's imperial cushions in order to moralize becomingly on the ancient world. The search for pleasure at the expense of discomfort, as frantic lovers woo their mistresses to partake the shelter of a hut and batten on a crust, Adrian deemed the bitterness of beggarliness. Let his sweet mistress be given him in the pomp and splendour due to his superior emotions, or not at all. Consequently the wise youth had long nursed an ineffectual passion, and it argued a great nature in him, that at the moment when his wishes were to be crowned, he should look with such slight touches of spleen at the gorgeous composite fabric of Parisian cookery and Roman antiquities crumbling into unsubstantial mockery. Assuredly very few even of the philosophers would have turned away uncomplainingly to meaner delights the moment after.

Hippias received the first portion of the cake.

He was sitting by the window in his hotel, reading. He had fought down his breakfast with more than usual success, and was looking forward to his dinner at the Foreys with less than usual timidity.

'Ah! glad you've come, Adrian,' he said, and expanded his chest. 'I was afraid I should have to ride down. This is kind of you. We'll walk down together through the park. It's absolutely dangerous to walk alone in these streets. My opinion is, that

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orange-peel lasts all through the year now, and will till legislation puts a stop to it. I give you my word I slipped on a piece of orange-peel yesterday afternoon in Piccadilly, and I thought I was down! I saved myself by a miracle.'

'You have an appetite, I hope?' Adrian asked.

'I think I shall get one, after a bit of a walk,' chirped Hippias. 'Yes. I think I feel hungry now.'

'Charmed to hear it,' said Adrian, and began unpinning his parcel on his knees. 'How should you define Folly?' he checked the process to inquire.

'Hm!' Hippias meditated; he prided himself on being oracular when such questions were addressed to him. 'I think I should define it to be a slide.'

'Very good definition. In other words, a piece of orange-peel; once on it, your life and limbs are in danger, and you are saved by a miracle. You must present that to the "Pilgrim." And the monument of folly, what would that be?'

Hippias meditated anew. 'All the human race on one another's shoulders.' He chuckled at the sweeping sourness of the instance.

'Very good,' Adrian applauded, 'or in default of that, some symbol of the thing, say; such as this of which I have here brought you a chip.'

Adrian displayed the quarter of the cake.

'This is the monument made portable—eh?'

'Cake!' cried Hippias, retreating his chair to dramatize his intense disgust. 'You're right of them that eat it. If I—if I don't mistake,' he peered at it, 'the noxious composition bedizened in that way is what they call wedding-cake. It's arrant poison! Who is

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it you want to kill? What are you carrying such stuff about for?'

Adrian rang the bell for a knife. 'To present you with your due and proper portion. You will have friends and relatives, and can't be saved from them, not even by miracle. It is a habit which exhibits, perhaps, the unconscious inherent cynicism of the human mind, for people who consider that they have reached the acme of mundane felicity, to distribute this token of esteem to their friends, with the object probably' (he took the knife from a waiter and went to the table to slice the cake) 'of enabling those friends (these edifices require very delicate incision—each particular currant and subtle condiment hangs to its neighbour—a wedding-cake is evidently the most highly civilized of cakes, and partakes of the evils as well as the advantages of civilization!)—I was saying, they send us these love-tokens, no doubt (we shall have to weigh out the crumbs, if each is to have his fair share) that we may the better estimate their state of bliss by passing some hours in purgatory. This, as far as I can apportion it without weights and scales, is your share, my uncle!'

He pushed the corner of the table bearing the cake towards Hippias.

'Get away!' Hippias vehemently motioned, and started from his chair. 'I'll have none of it, I tell you! It's death! It's fifty times worse than that beastly compound Christmas pudding! What fool has been doing this, then? Who dares send me cake? Me! It's an insult.'

'You are not compelled to eat any before dinner,' said Adrian, pointing the corner of the table after him,

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'but your share you must take, and appear to consume. One who has done so much to bring about the marriage cannot in conscience refuse his allotment of the fruits. Maidens, I hear, first cook it under their pillows, and extract nuptial dreams therefrom—said to be of a lighter class, taken that way. It 's a capital cake, and, upon my honour, you have helped to make it—you have indeed! So here it is.'

The table again went at Hippias. He ran nimbly round it, and flung himself on a sofa exhausted, crying: 'There! . . . My appetite 's gone for to-day!'

'Then shall I tell Richard that you won't touch a morsel of his cake?' said Adrian, leaning on his two hands over the table and looking at his uncle.

'Richard?'

'Yes, your nephew: my cousin: Richard! Your companion since you 've been in town. He 's married, you know. Married this morning at Kensington parish church, by licence, at half-past eleven of the clock, or twenty to. Married, and gone to spend his honeymoon in the Isle of Wight: a very delectable place for a month's residence. I have to announce to you that, thanks to your assistance, the experiment is launched, sir!——'

'Richard married!'

There was something to think and to say in objection to it, but the wits of poor Hippias were softened by the shock. His hand travelled half-way to his forehead, spread out to smooth the surface of that seat of reason, and then fell.

'Surely you knew all about it? you were so anxious to have him in town under your charge. . . .'

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'Married?' Hippias jumped up—he had it. 'Why, he's under age! he's an infant.'

'So he is. But the infant is not the less married. Fib like a man and pay your fee—what does it matter? Any one who is breeched can obtain a licence in our noble country. And the interests of morality demand that it should not be difficult. Is it true—can you persuade anybody that you have known nothing about it?'

'Ha! infamous joke! I wish, sir, you would play your pranks on somebody else,' said Hippias sternly, as he sank back on the sofa. 'You've done me up for the day, I can assure you.'

Adrian sat down to instil belief by gentle degrees, and put an artistic finish to the work. He had the gratification of passing his uncle through varied contortions, and at last Hippias perspired in conviction, and exclaimed, 'This accounts for his conduct to me. That boy must have a cunning nothing short of infernal! I feel . . . I feel it just here,' he drew a hand along his midriff.

'I'm not equal to this world of fools,' he added faintly, and shut his eyes. 'No, I can't dine. Eat? ha! . . . no. Go without me!'

Shortly after, Hippias went to bed, saying to himself, as he undressed, 'See what comes of our fine schemes! Poor Austin!' and as the pillow swelled over his ears, 'I'm not sure that a day's fast won't do me good.' The Dyspepsy had bought his philosophy at a heavy price; he had a right to use it.

Adrian resumed the procession of the cake.

He sighted his melancholy uncle Algernon hunting an appetite in the Row, and looking as if the hope

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ahead of him were also one-legged. The Captain did not pass without querying the ungainly parcel.

'I hope I carry it ostentatiously enough?' said Adrian. 'Enclosed is wherewithal to quiet the alarm of the land. Now may the maids and wives of Merry England sleep secure. I had half a mind to fix it on a pole, and engage a band to parade it. This is our dear Richard's wedding-cake. Married at half-past eleven this morning, by licence, at the Kensington parish church; his own ring being lost he employed the ring of his beautiful bride's lachrymose landlady, she standing adjacent by the altar. His farewell to you as a bachelor, and hers as a maid, you can claim on the spot, if you think proper, and digest according to your powers.'

Algernon let off steam in a whistle. 'Thompson, the solicitor's daughter!' he said. 'I met them the other day, somewhere about here. He introduced me to her. A pretty little baggage.'

'No.' Adrian set him right. ''Tis a Miss Desborough, a Roman Catholic dairymaid. Reminds one of pastoral England in the time of the Plantagenets! He's quite equal to introducing her as Thompson's daughter, and himself as Beelzebub's son. However, the wild animal is in Hymen's chains, and the cake is cut. Will you have your morsel?'

'Oh, by all means!—not now.' Algernon had an unwonted air of reflection.—'Father know it?'

'Not yet. He will to-night by nine o'clock.'

'Then I must see him by seven. Don't say you met me.'

He nodded, and pricked his horse.

'Wants money!' said Adrian, putting the combustible he carried once more in motion.

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The women were the crowning joy of his contemplative mind. He had reserved them for his final discharge. Dear demonstrative creatures! Dyspepsia would not weaken their poignant outcries, or self-interest check their fainting fits. On the generic woman one could calculate. Well might 'The Pilgrim's Scrip' say of her that, 'She is always at Nature's breast'; not intending it as a compliment. Each woman is Eve throughout the ages; whereas the 'Pilgrim' would have us believe that the Adam in men has become warier, if not wiser; and weak as he is, has learnt a lesson from time. Probably the Pilgrim's meaning may be taken to be, that Man grows, and Woman does not.

At any rate, Adrian hoped for such natural choruses as you hear in the nursery when a bauble is lost. He was awake to Mrs. Doria's maternal predestinations, and guessed that Clare stood ready with the best form of filial obedience. They were only a poor couple to gratify his Mephistophelian humour, to be sure, but Mrs. Doria was equal to twenty, and they would proclaim the diverse ways with which maidenhood and womanhood took disappointment, while the surrounding Forey girls and other females of the family assembly were expected to develop the finer shades and tapering edges of an agitation to which no woman could be cold.

All went well. He managed cleverly to leave the cake unchallenged in a conspicuous part of the drawing-room, and stepped gaily down to dinner. Much of the conversation adverted to Richard. Mrs. Doria asked him if he had seen the youth, or heard of him.

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'Seen him? no! Heard of him? yes!' said Adrian. 'I have heard of him. I heard that he was sublimely happy, and had eaten such a breakfast that dinner was impossible; claret and cold chicken, cake and——'

'Cake at breakfast!' they all interjected.

'That seems to his fancy just now.'

'What an extraordinary taste!'

'You know, he is educated on a System.'

One fast young male Forey allied the System and the cake in a miserable pun. Adrian, a hater of puns, looked at him, and held the table silent, as if he were going to speak; but he said nothing and the young gentleman vanished from the conversation in a blush, extinguished by his own spark.

Mrs. Doria peevishly exclaimed, 'Oh! fish-cake, I suppose! I wish he understood a little better the obligations of relationship.'

'Whether he understands them, I can't say,' observed Adrian, 'but I assure you he is very energetic in extending them.'

The wise youth talked innuendoes whenever he had an opportunity, that his dear relative might be rendered sufficiently inflammable by and by at the aspect of the cake; but he was not thought more than commonly mysterious and deep.

'Was his appointment at the house of those Grandison people?' Mrs. Doria asked, with a hostile upper-lip.

Adrian warmed the blindfolded parties by replying, 'Do they keep a beadle at the door?'

Mrs. Doria's animosity to Mrs. Grandison made her treat this as a piece of satirical ingenuousness. 'I dare say they do,' she said.

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'And a curate on hand?'

'Oh, I should think a dozen!'

Old Mr. Forey advised his punning grandson Clarence to give that house a wide berth, where he might be disposed of and dished-up at a moment's notice, and the scent ran off at a jest.

The Foreys gave good dinners, and with the old gentleman the excellent old fashion remained in permanence of trooping off the ladies as soon as they had taken their sustenance and just exchanged a smile with the flowers and the dessert, when they rose to fade with a beautiful accord, and the gallant males breathed under easier waistcoats, and settled to the business of the table, sure that an hour for unbosoming and imbibing was their own. Adrian took a chair by Brandon Forey, a barrister of standing.

'I want to ask you,' he said, 'whether an infant in law can legally bind himself.'

'If he's old enough to affix his signature to an instrument, I suppose he can,' yawned Brandon.

'Is he responsible for his acts?'

'I've no doubt we could hang him.'

'Then what he could do for himself, you could do for him?'

'Not quite so much; pretty near.'

'For instance, he can marry?'

'That's not a criminal case, you know.'

'And the marriage is valid?'

'You can dispute it.'

'Yes, and the Greeks and the Trojans can fight. It holds then?'

'Both water and fire!'

The patriarch of the table sang out to Adrian

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that he stopped the vigorous circulation of the claret.

'Dear me, sir!' said Adrian, 'I beg pardon. The circumstances must excuse me. The fact is, my cousin Richard got married to a dairymaid this morning, and I wanted to know whether it held in law.'

It was amusing to watch the manly coolness with which the announcement was taken. Nothing was heard more energetic than, 'Deuce he has!' and, 'A dairymaid!'

'I thought it better to let the ladies dine in peace,' Adrian continued. 'I wanted to be able to console my aunt——'

'Well, but—well, but,' the old gentleman, much the most excited, puffed—'eh, Brandon? He's a boy, this young ass! Do you mean to tell me a boy can go and marry when he pleases, and any trull he pleases, and the marriage is good? If I thought that I'd turn every woman off my premises. I would! from the housekeeper to the scullery-maid. I'd have no woman near him till—till——'

'Till the young greenhorn was grey, sir?' suggested Brandon.

'Till he knew what women are made of, sir!' the old gentleman finished his sentence vehemently. 'What, d'ye think, will Feverel say to it, Mr. Adrian?'

'He has been trying the very System you have proposed, sir—one that does not reckon on the powerful action of curiosity on the juvenile intelligence. I'm afraid it's the very worst way of solving the problem.'

'Of course it is,' said Clarence. 'None but a fool!——'

'At your age,' Adrian relieved his embarrassment,

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'it is natural, my dear Clarence, that you should consider the idea of an isolated or imprisoned manhood something monstrous, and we do not expect you to see what amount of wisdom it contains. You follow one extreme, and we the other. I don't say that a middle course exists. The history of mankind shows our painful efforts to find one, but they have invariably resolved themselves into asceticism, or laxity, acting and reacting. The moral question is, if a naughty little man, by reason of his naughtiness, releases himself from foolishness, does a foolish little man, by reason of his foolishness, save himself from naughtiness?'

A discussion, peculiar to men of the world, succeeded the laugh at Mr. Clarence. Then coffee was handed round and the footman informed Adrian, in a low voice, that Mrs. Doria Forey particularly wished to speak with him. Adrian preferred not to go in alone. 'Very well,' he said, and sipped his coffee. They talked on, sounding the depths of law in Brandon Forey, and receiving nought but hollow echoes from that profound cavity. He would not affirm that the marriage was invalid: he would not affirm that it could not be annulled. He thought not: still he thought it would be worth trying. A consummated and a non-consummated union were two different things. . . .

'Dear me!' said Adrian, 'does the Law recognize that? Why, that's almost human!'

Another message was brought to Adrian that Mrs. Doria Forey *very* particularly wished to speak with him.

'What can be the matter?' he exclaimed, pleased to have his faith in woman strengthened. The cake had exploded, no doubt.

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So it proved, when the gentlemen joined the fair society. All the younger ladies stood about the table, whereon the cake stood displayed, gaps being left for those sitting to feast their vision, and intrude the comments and speculations continually arising from fresh shocks of wonder at the unaccountable apparition. Entering with the half-guilty air of men who know they have come from a grosser atmosphere, the gallant males also arranged themselves round the common object of curiosity.

'Here! Adrian!' Mrs. Doria cried. 'Where is Adrian? Pray, come here. Tell me! Where did this cake come from? Whose is it? What does it do here? You know all about it, for you brought it. Clare saw you bring it into the room. What does it mean? I insist upon a direct answer. Now do not make me impatient, Adrian.'

Certainly Mrs. Doria was equal to twenty. By her concentrated rapidity and volcanic complexion it was evident that suspicion had kindled.

'I was really bound to bring it,' Adrian protested.

'Answer me!'

The wise youth bowed: 'Categorically. This cake came from the house of a person, a female, of the name of Berry. It belongs to you partly, partly to me, partly to Clare, and to the rest of our family, on the principle of equal division: for which purpose it is present. . . .'

'Yes! Speak!'

'It means, my dear aunt, what that kind of cake usually does mean.'

'This, then, is the Breakfast! And the ring! Adrian! where is Richard?'

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Mrs. Doria still clung to unbelief in the monstrous horror.

But when Adrian told her that Richard had left town, her struggling hope sank. 'The wretched boy has ruined himself!' she said, and sat down trembling.

Oh! that System! The delicate vituperations gentle ladies use instead of oaths, Mrs. Doria showered on that System. She hesitated not to say that her brother had got what he deserved. Opinionated, morbid, weak, justice had overtaken him. Now he would see! but at what a price! at what a sacrifice!

Mrs. Doria commanded Adrian to confirm her fears.

Sadly the wise youth recapitulated Berry's words. 'He was married this morning at half-past eleven of the clock, or twenty to twelve, by licence, at the Kensington parish church.'

'Then that was his appointment!' Mrs. Doria murmured.

'That was the cake for breakfast!' breathed a second of her sex.

'And it was his ring!' exclaimed a third.

The men were silent, and made long faces.

Clare stood cold and sedate. She and her mother avoided each other's eyes.

'Is it that abominable country person, Adrian?'

'The happy damsel is, I regret to say, the Papist dairymaid,' said Adrian, in sorrowful but deliberate accents.

Then arose a feminine hum, in the midst of which Mrs. Doria cried, 'Brandon!' She was a woman of energy. Her thoughts resolved to action spontaneously.

'Brandon,' she drew the barrister a little aside, 'can they not be followed, and separated? I want your

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advice? Cannot we separate them? A boy! it is really shameful if he should be allowed to fall into the toils of a designing creature to ruin himself irrevocably. Can we not, Brandon?'

The worthy barrister felt inclined to laugh, but he answered her entreaties: 'From what I hear of the young groom I should imagine the office perilous.'

'I'm speaking of law, Brandon. Can we not obtain an order from one of your Courts to pursue them and separate them instantly?'

'This evening?'

'Yes!'

Brandon was sorry to say she decidedly could not.

'You might call on one of your Judges, Brandon.'

Brandon assured her that the Judges were a hard-worked race, and to a man slept heavily after dinner.

'Will you do so to-morrow, the first thing in the morning? Will you promise me to do so, Brandon? —Or a magistrate! A magistrate would send a policeman after them. My dear Brandon! I beg—I beg you to assist us in this dreadful extremity. It will be the death of my poor brother. I believe he would forgive anything but this. You have no idea what his notions are of blood.'

Brandon tipped Adrian a significant nod to step in and aid.

'What is it, aunt?' asked the wise youth. 'You want them followed and torn asunder by wild policemen?'

'To-morrow!' Brandon queerly interposed.

'Won't that be—just too late?' Adrian suggested.

Mrs. Doria sighed out her last spark of hope.

'You see,' said Adrian. . . .

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'Yes! yes!' Mrs. Doria did not require any of his elucidations. 'Pray be quiet, Adrian, and let me speak. Brandon! it cannot be! it's quite impossible! Can you stand there and tell me that boy is legally married? I never will believe it! The law cannot be so shamefully bad as to permit a boy—a mere child—to do such absurd things. Grandpapa!' she beckoned to the old gentleman. 'Grandpapa! pray do make Brandon speak. These lawyers never will. He might stop it, if he would. If I were a man, do you think I would stand here?'

'Well, my dear,' the old gentleman toddled to compose her, 'I'm quite of your opinion. I believe he knows no more than you or I. My belief is they none of them know anything till they join issue and go into Court. I want to see a few female lawyers.'

'To encourage the bankrupt perruquier, sir?' said Adrian. 'They would have to keep a large supply of wigs on hand.'

'And you can jest, Adrian!' his aunt reproached him. 'But I will not be beaten. I know—I am firmly convinced that no law would ever allow a boy to disgrace his family and ruin himself like that, and nothing shall persuade me that it is so. Now, tell me, Brandon, and pray do speak in answer to my questions, and please to forget you are dealing with a woman. *Can* my nephew be rescued from the consequences of his folly? *Is* what he has done legitimate? *Is* he bound for life by what he has done while a boy?'

'Well—a,' Brandon breathed through his teeth. 'A—hm! the matter's so very delicate, you see, Helen.'

'You're to forget that,' Adrian remarked.

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'A—hm! well!' pursued Brandon. 'Perhaps if you could arrest and divide them before nightfall, and make affidavit of certain facts. . . .'

'Yes?' the eager woman hastened his lagging mouth.

'Well . . . hm! a . . . in that case . . . a. . . . Or if a lunatic, you could prove him to have been of unsound mind. . . .'

'Oh! there's no doubt of his madness on *my* mind, Brandon.'

'Yes! well! in that case. . . . Or if of different religious persuasions. . . .'

'She *is* a Catholic!' Mrs. Doria joyfully interjected.

'Yes! well! in that case . . . objections might be taken to the form of the marriage. . . . Might be proved fictitious. . . . Or if he's under, say, eighteen years. . . .'

'He *can't* be much more,' cried Mrs. Doria. 'I think,' she appeared to reflect, and then faltered imploringly to Adrian, 'What is Richard's age?'

The kind wise youth could not find it in his heart to strike away the phantom straw she caught at.

'Oh! about that, I should fancy,' he muttered, and found it necessary at the same time to duck and turn his head for concealment. Mrs. Doria surpassed his expectations.

'Yes! well, then. . . .' Brandon was resuming with a shrug, which was meant to say he still pledged himself to nothing, when Clare's voice was heard from out the buzzing circle of her cousins: 'Richard is nineteen years and six months old to-day, mama.'

'Nonsense, child.'

'He is, mama.' Clare's voice was very stedfast.

'Non*sense*, I tell you. How *can* you know?'

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'Richard is one year and nine months older than me, mama.'

Mrs. Doria fought the fact by years and finally by months. Clare was too strong for her.

'Singular child!' she mentally apostrophized the girl who scornfully rejected straws while drowning.

'But there's the religion still!' she comforted herself, and sat down to cogitate.

The men smiled and looked vacuous.

Music was proposed. There are times when soft music hath not charms; when it is put to as base uses as Imperial Cæsar's dust and is taken to fill horrid pauses. Angelica Forey thumped the piano, and sang: '*I'm a laughing Gitana, ha—ha! ha—ha!*' Matilda Forey and her cousin Mary Branksburne wedded their voices, and songfully incited all young people to *Haste to the bower that love has built*, and defy the wise ones of the world; but the wise ones of the world were in a majority there, and very few places of assembly will be found where they are not; so the glowing appeal of the British ballad-monger passed into the bosom of the emptiness he addressed. Clare was asked to entertain the company. The singular child calmly marched to the instrument, and turned over the appropriate illustrations to the ballad-monger's repertory.

Clare sang a little Irish air. Her duty done, she marched from the piano. Mothers are rarely deceived by their daughters in these matters; but Clare deceived her mother; and Mrs. Doria only persisted in feeling an agony of pity for her child, that she might the more warrantably pity herself—a not uncommon form of the emotion, for there is no juggler like that heart the ballad-monger puts into our mouths so boldly.

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Remember that she saw years of self-denial, years of a ripening scheme, rendered fruitless in a minute, and by the System which had almost reduced her to the condition of constitutional hypocrite. She had enough of bitterness to brood over, and some excuse for self-pity.

Still, even when she was cooler, Mrs. Doria's energetic nature prevented her from giving up. Straws were straws, and the frailer they were the harder she clutched them.

She rose from her chair, and left the room, calling to Adrian to follow her.

'Adrian,' she said, turning upon him in the passage, 'you mentioned a house where this horrible cake . . . where he was this morning. I desire you to take me to that woman immediately.'

The wise youth had not bargained for personal servitude. He had hoped he should be in time for the last act of the opera that night, after enjoying the comedy of real life.

'My dear aunt . . .' he was beginning to insinuate.

'Order a cab to be sent for, and get your hat,' said Mrs. Doria.

There was nothing for it but to obey. He stamped his assent to the 'Pilgrim's' dictum, that Women are practical creatures, and now reflected on his own account, that relationship to a young fool may be a vexation and a nuisance. However, Mrs. Doria compensated him.

What Mrs. Doria intended to do, the practical creature did not plainly know; but her energy positively demanded to be used in some way or other, and her instinct directed her to the offender on whom she could

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use it in wrath. She wanted somebody to be angry with, somebody to abuse. She dared not abuse her brother to his face: him she would have to console. Adrian was a fellow-hypocrite to the System, and would, she was aware, bring her into painfully delicate, albeit, highly philosophic, ground by a discussion of the case. So she drove to Bessy Berry simply to inquire whither her nephew had flown.

When a soft woman, and that soft woman a sinner, is matched with a woman of energy, she does not show much fight, and she meets no mercy. Bessy Berry's creditor came to her in female form that night. She then beheld it in all its terrors. Hitherto it had appeared to her as a male, a disembodied spirit of her imagination possessing male attributes, and the peculiar male characteristic of being moved, and ultimately silenced by tears. As female, her creditor was terrible indeed. Still, had it not been a late hour, Bessy Berry would have died rather than speak openly that her babes had sped to make their nest in the Isle of Wight. They had a long start, they were out of the reach of pursuers, they were safe, and she told what she had to tell. She told more than was wise of her to tell. She made mention of her early service in the family, and of her little pension. Alas! her little pension! Her creditor had come expecting no payment—come, as creditors are wont in such moods, just to take it out of her—to employ the familiar term. At once Mrs. Doria pounced upon the pension.

'That, of course, you know is at an end,' she said in the calmest manner, and Berry did not plead for the little bit of bread to her. She only asked a little consideration for her feelings.

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True admirers of women had better stand aside from the scene. Undoubtedly it was very sad for Adrian to be compelled to witness it. Mrs. Doria was not generous. The 'Pilgrim' may be wrong about the sex not growing; but its fashion of conducting warfare we must allow to be barbarous, and according to what is deemed the pristine or wild cat method. Ruin, nothing short of it, accompanied poor Berry to her bed that night, and her character bled till morning on her pillow.

The scene over, Adrian reconducted Mrs. Doria to her home. Mice had been at the cake during her absence, apparently. The ladies and gentlemen present put it on the greedy mice, who were accused of having gorged and gone to bed.

'I'm sure they're quite welcome,' said Mrs. Doria. 'It's a farce, this marriage, and Adrian has quite come to my way of thinking. I would not touch an atom of it. Why, they were married in a married woman's ring! Can *that* be legal, as you call it? Oh, I'm convinced! Don't tell me. Austin will be in town to-morrow, and if he is true to his principles, he will instantly adopt measures to rescue his son from infamy. I want no legal advice. I go upon common sense, common decency. This marriage is false.'

Mrs. Doria's fine scheme had become so much a part of her life, that she could not give it up. She took Clare to her bed, and caressed and wept over her, as she would not have done had she known the singular child, saying, 'Poor Richard! my dear poor boy! we must save him, Clare! we must save him!' Of the two the mother showed the greater want of iron on this occasion. Clare lay in her arms rigid and emotion-

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less, with one of her hands tight-locked. All she said was: 'I knew it in the morning, mama.' She slept clasping Richard's nuptial ring.

By this time all specially concerned in the System knew it. The honeymoon was shining placidly above them. Is not happiness like another circulating medium? When we have a very great deal of it, some poor hearts are aching for what is taken away from them. When we have gone out and seized it on the highways, certain inscrutable laws are sure to be at work to bring us to the criminal bar, sooner or later. Who knows the honeymoon that did not steal somebody's sweetness? Richard Turpin went forth, singing: 'Money or life' to the world: Richard Feverel has done the same, substituting 'Happiness' for 'Money,' frequently synonyms. The coin he wanted he would have, and was just as much a highway robber as his fellow Dick, so that those who have failed to recognize him as a hero before, may now regard him in that light. Meanwhile the world he has squeezed looks exceedingly patient and beautiful. His coin chinks delicious music to him. Nature and the order of things on earth have no warmer admirer than a jolly brigand or a young man made happy by the Jews.

CHAPTER XXXIII

Nursing the Devil

And now the author of the System was on trial under the eyes of the lady who loved him. What so kind as they? Yet are they very rigorous, those soft watch-

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ful woman's eyes. If you are below the measure they have made of you, you will feel it in the fulness of time. She cannot but show you that she took you for a giant, and has had to come down a bit. You feel yourself strangely diminishing in those sweet mirrors, till at last they drop on you complacently level. But, oh beware, vain man, of ever waxing enamoured of that wonderful elongation of a male creature you saw reflected in her adoring upcast orbs! Beware of assisting to delude her! A woman who is not quite a fool will forgive your being but a man, if you are surely that: she will haply learn to acknowledge that no mortal tailor could have fitted that figure she made of you respectably, and that practically (though she sighs to think it) her ideal of you was on the pattern of an overgrown charity-boy in the regulation jacket and breech. For this she first scorns the narrow capacities of the tailor, and then smiles at herself. But shouldst thou, when the hour says plainly, Be thyself, and the woman is willing to take thee as thou art, shouldst thou still aspire to be that thing of shanks and wrists, wilt thou not seem contemptible as well as ridiculous? And when the fall comes, will it not be flat on thy face, instead of to the common height of men? You may fall miles below her measure of you, and be safe: nothing is damaged save an overgrown charity-boy; but if you fall below the common height of men, you must make up your mind to see her rustle her gown, spy at the looking-glass, and transfer her allegiance. The moral of which is, that if we pretend to be what we are not, women, for whose amusement the farce is performed, will find us out and punish us for it. And it is usually the end of a sentimental dalliance.

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CHAPTER XXXIII Nursing the Devil

Had Sir Austin given vent to the pain and wrath it was natural he should feel, he might have gone to unphilosophic excesses, and, however much he lowered his reputation as a sage, Lady Blandish would have excused him: she would not have loved him less for seeing him closer. But the poor gentleman tasked his soul and stretched his muscles to act up to her conception of him. He, a man of science in life, who was bound to be surprised by nothing in nature, it was not for him to do more than lift his eyebrows and draw in his lips at the news delivered by Ripton Thompson, that ill bird at Raynham.

All he said, after Ripton had handed the letters and carried his penitential headache to bed, was: 'You see, Emmeline, it is useless to base any system on a human being.'

A very philosophical remark for one who has been busily at work building for nearly twenty years. Too philosophical to seem genuine. It revealed where the blow struck sharpest. Richard was no longer the Richard of his creation—his pride and his joy—but simply a human being with the rest. The bright star had sunk among the mass.

And yet, what had the young man done? And in what had the System failed?

The lady could not but ask herself this, while she condoled with the offended father.

'My friend,' she said, tenderly taking his hand before she retired, 'I know how deeply you must be grieved. I know what your disappointment must be. I do not beg of you to forgive him now. You cannot doubt his love for this young person, and according to his light, has he not behaved honourably, and as you

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would have wished, rather than bring her to shame? You will think of that. It has been an accident—a misfortune—a terrible misfortune. . . .'

'The God of this world is in the machine—not out of it,' Sir Austin interrupted her, and pressed her hand to get the good-night over.

At any other time her mind would have been arrested to admire the phrase; now it seemed perverse, vain, false, and she was tempted to turn the meaning that was in it against himself, much as she pitied him.

'You know, Emmeline,' he added, 'I believe very little in the fortune, or misfortune, to which men attribute their successes and reverses. They are useful impersonations to novelists; but my opinion is sufficiently high of flesh and blood to believe that we make our own history without intervention. Accidents?—Terrible misfortunes?—What are they? —Good-night.'

'Good-night,' she said, looking sad and troubled. 'When I said "misfortune," I meant, of course, that he is to blame, but—shall I leave you his letter to me?'

'I think I have enough to meditate upon,' he replied, coldly bowing.

'God bless you,' she whispered. 'And—may I say it? do not shut your heart.'

He assured her that he hoped not to do so, and the moment she was gone he set about shutting it as tight as he could.

If, instead of saying, Base no system on a human being, he had said, Never experimentalize with one, he would have been nearer the truth of his own case. He

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had experimented on humanity in the person of the son he loved as his life, and at once, when the experiment appeared to have failed, all humanity's failings fell on the shoulders of his son. Richard's parting laugh in the train—it was explicable now: it sounded in his ears like the mockery of this base nature of ours at every endeavour to exalt and chasten it. The young man had plotted this. From step to step Sir Austin traced the plot. The curious mask he had worn since his illness; the selection of his incapable uncle Hippias for a companion in preference to Adrian; it was an evident, well-perfected plot. That hideous laugh would not be silenced. Base, like the rest, treacherous, a creature of passions using his abilities solely to gratify them — never surely had humanity such chances as in him! A Manichæan tendency, from which the sententious eulogist of nature had been struggling for years (and which was partly at the bottom of the System), now began to cloud and usurp dominion of his mind. As he sat alone in the forlorn dead-hush of his library, he saw the devil.

How are we to know when we are at the head and fountain of the fates of them we love?

There by the springs of Richard's future, his father sat: and the devil said to him: 'Only be quiet: do nothing: resolutely do nothing: your object now is to keep a brave face to the world, so that all may know you superior to this human nature that has deceived you. For it is the shameless deception, not the marriage, that has wounded you.'

'Ay!' answered the baronet, 'the shameless deception, not the marriage! wicked and ruinous as it must be; a destroyer of my tenderest hopes! my dearest

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schemes! Not the marriage:—the shameless deception!' and he crumpled up his son's letter to him, and tossed it into the fire.

How are we to distinguish the dark chief of the Manichæans when he talks our own thoughts to us?

Further he whispered, 'And your System:—if you would be brave to the world, have courage to cast the dream of it out of you: relinquish an impossible project; see it as it is—dead: too good for men!'

'Ay!' muttered the baronet: 'all who would save them perish on the Cross!'

And so he sat nursing the devil.

By and by he took his lamp, and put on the old cloak and cap, and went to gaze at Ripton. That exhausted debauchee and youth without a destiny slept a dead sleep. A handkerchief was bound about his forehead, and his helpless sunken chin and snoring nose projected up the pillow, made him look absurdly piteous. The baronet remembered how often he had compared his boy with this one: his own bright boy! And where was the difference between them?

'Mere outward gilding!' said his familiar.

'Yes,' he responded, 'I dare say this one never positively plotted to deceive his father: he followed his appetites unchecked, and is internally the sounder of the two.'

Ripton, with his sunken chin and snoring nose under the light of the lamp, stood for human nature, honest, however abject.

'Miss Random, I fear very much, is a necessary establishment!' whispered the monitor.

'Does the evil in us demand its natural food, or it corrupts the whole?' ejaculated Sir Austin. 'And is

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no angel of avail till that is drawn off? And is that our conflict—to see whether we can escape the contagion of its embrace, and come uncorrupted out of that?'

'The world is wise in its way,' said the voice.

'Though it look on itself through port wine?' he suggested, remembering his lawyer Thompson.

'Wise in not seeking to be too wise,' said the voice.

'And getting intoxicated on its drug of comfort!'

'Human nature is weak.'

'And Miss Random is an establishment, and Wild Oats an institution!'

'It always has been so.'

'And always will be?'

'So I fear! in spite of your very noble efforts.'

'And leads—whither? And ends—where?'

Richard's laugh, taken up by horrid reverberations, as it were through the lengths of the Lower Halls, replied.

This colloquy of two voices in a brain was concluded by Sir Austin asking again if there were no actual difference between the flower of his hopes and yonder drunken weed, and receiving for answer that there was a decided dissimilarity in the smell of the couple; becoming cognizant of which he retreated.

Sir Austin did not battle with the tempter. He took him into his bosom at once, as if he had been ripe for him, and received his suggestions, and bowed to his dictates. Because he suffered, and decreed that he would suffer silently, and be the only sufferer, it seemed to him that he was great-minded in his calamity. He had stood against the world. The world had beaten him. What then? He must shut his heart and mask his face; that was all. To be far in advance

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of the mass, is as fruitless to mankind, he reflected, as straggling in the rear. For how do we know that they move behind us at all, or move in our track? What we win for them is lost; and where we are overthrown we lie!

It was thus that a fine mind and a fine heart at the bounds of a nature not great, chose to colour his retrogression and countenance his shortcoming; and it was thus that he set about ruining the work he had done. He might well say, as he once did, that there are hours when the clearest soul becomes a cunning fox. For a grief that was private and peculiar, he unhesitatingly cast the blame upon humanity; just as he had accused it in the period of what he termed his own ordeal. How had he borne that? By masking his face. And he prepared the ordeal for his son by doing the same. This was by no means his idea of a man's duty in tribulation, about which he could be strenuously eloquent. But it was his instinct so to act, and in times of trial great natures alone are not at the mercy of their instincts. Moreover it would cost him pain to mask his face; pain worse than that he endured when there still remained an object for him to open his heart to in proportion; and he always reposed upon the Spartan comfort of bearing pain and being passive. 'Do nothing,' said the devil he nursed; which meant in his case, 'Take me into you and don't cast me out.' Excellent and sane is the outburst of wrath to men, when it stops short of slaughter. For who that locks it up to eat in solitary, can say that it is consumed? Sir Austin had as weak a digestion for wrath, as poor Hippias for a green duckling. Instead of eating it, it ate him. The wild beast in him was not the less

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deadly because it did not roar, and the devil in him not the less active because he resolved to do nothing.

He sat at the springs of Richard's future, in the forlorn dead-hush of his library there, hearing the cinders click in the extinguished fire, and that humming stillness in which one may fancy one hears the midnight Fates busily stirring their embryos. The lamp glowed mildly on the bust of Chatham.

Toward morning a gentle knock fell at his door. Lady Blandish glided in. With hasty step she came straight to him, and took both his hands.

'My friend,' she said, speaking tearfully, and trembling, 'I feared I should find you here. I could not sleep. How is it with you?'

'Well! Emmeline, well!' he replied, torturing his brows to fix the mask.

He wished it had been Adrian who had come to him. He had an extraordinary longing for Adrian's society. He knew that the wise youth would divine how to treat him, and he mentally confessed to just enough weakness to demand a certain kind of management. Besides Adrian, he had not a doubt, would accept him entirely as he seemed, and not pester him in any way by trying to unlock his heart; whereas, a woman, he feared, would be waxing too womanly, and swelling from tears and supplications to a scene, of all things abhorred by him the most. So he rapped the floor with his foot, and gave the lady no very welcome face when he said it was well with him.

She sat down by his side, still holding one hand firmly, and softly detaining the other.

'Oh, my friend! may I believe you? May I speak to you?' She leaned close to him. 'You know my

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heart. I have no better ambition than to be your friend. Surely I divide your grief, and may I not claim your confidence? Who has wept more over your great and dreadful sorrows? I would not have come to you, but I do believe that sorrow shared relieves the burden, and it is now that you may feel a woman's aid, and something of what a woman could be to you. . . .'

'Be assured,' he gravely said, 'I thank you, Emmeline, for your intentions.'

'No, no! not for my intentions! And do not thank me. Think of him . . . think of your dear boy. . . . Our Richard, as we have called him.—Oh! do not think it a foolish superstition of mine, but I have had a thought this night that has kept me in torment till I rose to speak to you. . . . Tell me first you have forgiven him.'

'A father bears no malice to his son, Emmeline.'

'Your heart has forgiven him?'

'My heart has taken what he gave.'

'And quite forgiven him?'

'You will hear no complaints of mine.'

The lady paused despondingly, and looked at him in a wistful manner, saying with a sigh, 'Yes! I know how noble you are, and different from others!'

He drew one of his hands from her relaxed hold.

'You ought to be in bed, Emmeline.'

'I cannot sleep.'

'Go, and talk to me another time.'

'No, it must be now. You have helped me when I struggled to rise into a clearer world, and I think, humble as I am, I can help you now. I have had a thought this night that if you do not pray for him and

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bless him . . . it will end miserably. My friend, have you done so?'

He was stung and offended, and could hardly help showing it in spite of his mask.

'Have you done so, Austin?'

'This is assuredly a new way of committing fathers to the follies of their sons, Emmeline!'

'No, not that. But will you pray for your boy, and bless him, before the day comes?'

He restrained himself to pronounce his words calmly:—'And I must do this, or it will end in misery? How else can it end? Can I save him from the seed he has sown? Consider, Emmeline, what you say. He has repeated his cousin's sin. You see the end of that. . . .'

'Oh, so different! This young person is *not*, is *not* of the class poor Austin Wentworth allied himself to. Indeed it is different. And he—be just and admit his nobleness. I fancied you did. This young person has great beauty, she has the elements of good breeding, she—indeed I think, had she been in another position, you would not have looked upon her unfavourably.'

'She may be too good for my son!' The baronet spoke with sublime bitterness.

'No woman is too good for Richard, and you know it.'

'Pass her.'

'Yes, I will speak only of him. He met her by a fatal accident. We thought his love dead, and so did he till he saw her again. He met her, he thought we were plotting against him, he thought he should lose her for ever, and in the madness of an hour he did this. . . .'

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'My Emmeline pleads bravely for clandestine matches.'

'Ah! do not trifle, my friend. Say: would you have had him act as young men in his position generally do to young women beneath them?'

Sir Austin did not like the question. It probed him very severely.

'You mean,' he said, 'that fathers must fold their arms, and either submit to infamous marriages, or have these creatures ruined.'

'I do *not* mean that,' exclaimed the lady, striving for what she did mean, and how to express it. 'I mean that . . . he loved her. Is it not a madness at his age? But what I chiefly mean is—save him from the consequences. No, you shall not withdraw your hand. Think of his pride, his sensitiveness, his great wild nature—wild when he is set wrong: think, how intense it is, set upon love; think, my friend, do not forget his love for you.'

Sir Austin smiled an admirable smile of pity.

'That I should save him, or any one, from consequences, is asking more than the order of things will allow to you, Emmeline, and is not in the disposition of this world. I cannot. Consequences are the natural offspring of acts. My child, you are talking sentiment, which is the distraction of our modern age in everything—a phantasmal vapour distorting the image of the life we live. You ask me to give him a golden age in spite of himself. All that could be done, by keeping him in the paths of virtue and truth, I did. He is become a man, and as a man he must reap his own sowing.'

The baffled lady sighed. He sat so rigid: he spoke

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so securely, as if wisdom were to him more than the love of his son. And yet he did love his son. Feeling sure that he loved his son while he spoke so loftily, she reverenced him still, baffled as she was, and sensible that she had been quibbled with.

'All I ask of you is to open your heart to him,' she said.

He kept silent.

'Call him a man,—he is, and must ever be the child of your education, my friend.'

'You would console me, Emmeline, with the prospect that, if he ruins himself, he spares the world of young women. Yes, that is something!'

Closely she scanned the mask. It was impenetrable. He could meet her eyes, and respond to the pressure of her hand, and smile, and not show what he felt. Nor did he deem it hypocritical to seek to maintain his elevation in her soft soul, by simulating supreme philosophy over offended love. Nor did he know that he had an angel with him then: a blind angel, and a weak one, but one who struck upon his chance.

'Am I pardoned for coming to you?' she said, after a pause.

'Surely I can read my Emmeline's intentions,' he gently replied.

'Very poor ones. I feel my weakness. I cannot utter half I have been thinking. Oh, if I could!'

'You speak very well, Emmeline.'

'At least, I am pardoned!'

'Surely so.'

'And before I leave you, dear friend, shall I be forgiven?—may I beg it?—will you bless him?'

He was again silent.

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'Pray for him, Austin! pray for him ere the night is over.'

As she spoke she slid down to his feet and pressed his hand to her bosom.

The baronet was startled. In very dread of the soft fit that wooed him, he pushed back his chair, and rose, and went to the window.

'It's day already!' he said with assumed vivacity throwing open the shutters, and displaying the young light on the lawn.

Lady Blandish dried her tears as she knelt, and then joined him, and glanced up silently at Richard's moon standing in wane toward the West. She hoped it was because of her having been premature in pleading so earnestly, that she had failed to move him, and she accused herself more than the baronet. But in acting as she had done, she had treated him as no common man, and she was compelled to perceive that his heart was at present hardly superior to the hearts of ordinary men, however composed his face might be, and apparently serene his wisdom. From that moment she grew critical of him, and began to study her idol—a process dangerous to idols. He, now that she seemed to have relinquished the painful subject, drew to her, and as one who wished to smooth a foregone roughness, murmured: 'God's rarest blessing is, after all, a good woman! My Emmeline bears her sleepless night well. She does not shame the day.' He gazed down on her with a fondling tenderness.

'I could bear many, many!' she replied, meeting his eyes, 'and you would see me look better and better, if . . . if only . . .' but she had no encouragement to end the sentence.

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Perhaps he wanted some mute form of consolation; perhaps the handsome placid features of the dark-eyed dame touched him: at any rate their Platonism was advanced by his putting an arm about her. She felt the arm and talked of the morning.

Thus proximate, they by and by both heard something very like a groan behind them, and looking round, beheld the Saurian eye. Lady Blandish smiled, but the baronet's discomposure was not to be concealed. By a strange fatality every stage of their innocent loves was certain to have a human beholder.

'Oh, I'm sure I beg pardon,' Benson mumbled, arresting his head in a melancholy pendulosity. He was ordered out of the room.

'And I think I shall follow him, and try to get forty winks,' said Lady Blandish. They parted with a quiet squeeze of hands.

The baronet then called in Benson.

'Get me my breakfast as soon as you can,' he said, regardless of the aspect of injured conscience Benson sombrely presented to him. 'I am going to town early. And, Benson,' he added, 'you will also go to town this afternoon, or to-morrow, if it suits you, and take your book with you to Mr. Thompson. You will not return here. A provision will be made for you. You can go.'

The heavy butler essayed to speak, but the tremendous blow and the baronet's gesture choked him. At the door he made another effort which shook the rolls of his loose skin pitiably. An impatient signal sent him out dumb,—and Raynham was quit of the one believer in the Great Shaddock dogma.

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CHAPTER XXXIV

Conquest of an Epicure

It was the month of July. The Solent ran up green waves before a full-blowing South-wester. Gay little yachts bounded out like foam, and flashed their sails, light as sea-nymphs. A crown of deep Summer blue topped the flying mountains of cloud.

By an open window that looked on the brine through nodding roses, our young bridal pair were at breakfast, regaling worthily, both of them. Had the Scientific Humanist observed them, he could not have contested the fact, that as a couple who had set up to be father and mother of Britons, they were doing their duty. Files of egg-cups with disintegrated shells bore witness to it, and they were still at work, hardly talking from rapidity of exercise. Both were dressed for an expedition. She had her bonnet on, and he his yachting-hat. His sleeves were turned over at the wrists, and her gown showed its lining on her lap. At times a chance word might spring a laugh, but eating was the business of the hour, as I would have you to know it always will be where Cupid is in earnest. Tribute flowed in to them from the subject land. Neglected lies Love's penny-whistle on which they played so prettily, and charmed the spheres to hear them. What do they care for the spheres, who have one another? Come, eggs! come, bread and butter! come, tea with sugar in it and milk! and welcome, the jolly hours. That is a fair interpretation of the music in them just

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now. Yonder instrument was good only for the overture. After all, what finer aspiration can lovers have, than to be free man and woman in the heart of plenty? And is it not a glorious level to have attained? Ah, wretched Scientific Humanist! not to be by and mark the admirable sight of these young creatures feeding. It would have been a spell to exorcise the Manichee, methinks.

The mighty performance came to an end, and then, with a flourish of his table-napkin, husband stood over wife, who met him on the confident budding of her mouth. The poetry of mortals is their daily prose. Is it not a glorious level to have attained? A short, quick-blooded kiss, radiant, fresh, and honest as Aurora, and then Richard says without lack of cheer, 'No letter to-day, my Lucy!' whereat her sweet eyes dwell on him a little seriously, but he cries, 'Never mind! he'll be coming down himself some morning. He has only to know her, and all's well! eh?' and so saying he puts a hand beneath her chin, and seems to frame her fair face in fancy, she smiling up to be looked at.

'But one thing I do want to ask my darling,' says Lucy, and dropped into his bosom with hands of petition. 'Take me on board his yacht with him to-day—not leave me with those people! Will he? I'm a good sailor, he knows!'

'The best afloat!' laughs Richard, hugging her, 'but, you know, you darling bit of a sailor, they don't allow more than a certain number on board for the race, and if they hear you've been with me, there'll be cries of foul play! Besides, there's Lady Judith to talk to you about Austin, and Lord Mountfalcon's

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compliments for you to listen to, and Mr. Morton to take care of you.'

Lucy's eyes fixed sideways an instant.

'I hope I don't frown and blush as I did?' she said, screwing her pliable brows up to him winningly, and he bent his cheek against hers, and murmured something delicious.

'And we shall be separated for—how many hours? one, two, three hours!' she pouted to his flatteries.

'And then I shall come on board to receive my bride's congratulations.'

'And then my husband will talk all the time to Lady Judith.'

'And then I shall see my wife frowning and blushing at Lord Mountfalcon.'

'Am I so foolish, Richard?' she forgot her trifling to ask in an earnest way, and had another Aurorean kiss, just brushing the dew on her lips, for answer.

After hiding a month in shyest shade, the pair of happy sinners had wandered forth one day to look on men and marvel at them, and had chanced to meet Mr. Morton of Poer Hall, Austin Wentworth's friend, and Ralph's uncle. Mr. Morton had once been intimate with the baronet, but had given him up for many years as impracticable and hopeless, for which reason he was the more inclined to regard Richard's misdemeanour charitably, and to lay the faults of the son on the father; and thinking society to be the one thing requisite to the young man, he had introduced him to the people he knew in the island; among others to the Lady Judith Felle, a fair young dame, who introduced him to Lord Mountfalcon, a puissant nobleman; who introduced him to the yachtsmen beginning to

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congregate; so that in a few weeks he found himself in the centre of a brilliant company, and for the first time in his life tasted what it was to have free intercourse with his fellow-creatures of both sexes. The son of a System was, therefore, launched; not only through the surf, but in deep waters.

Now the baronet had so far compromised between the recurrence of his softer feelings and the suggestions of his new familiar, that he had determined to act toward Richard with justness. The world called it magnanimity, and even Lady Blandish had some thoughts of the same kind when she heard that he had decreed to Richard a handsome allowance, and had scouted Mrs. Doria's proposal for him to contest the legality of the marriage; but Sir Austin knew well he was simply just in not withholding money from a youth so situated. And here again the world deceived him by embellishing his conduct. For what is it to be just to whom we love! He knew it was not magnanimous, but the cry of the world somehow fortified him in the conceit that in dealing perfect justice to his son he was doing all that was possible, because so much more than common fathers would have done. He had shut his heart.

Consequently Richard did not want money. What he wanted more, and did not get, was a word from his father, and though he said nothing to sadden his young bride, she felt how much it preyed upon him to be at variance with the man whom, now that he had offended him and gone against him, he would have fallen on his knees to; the man who was as no other man to him. She heard him of nights when she lay by his side, and the darkness, and the broken mutterings, of those

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nights clothed the figure of the strange stern man in her mind. Not that it affected the appetites of the pretty pair. We must not expect that of Cupid enthroned and in condition; under the influence of sea-air, too. The files of egg-cups laugh at such an idea. Still the worm did gnaw them. Judge, then, of their delight when, on this pleasant morning, as they were issuing from the garden of their cottage to go down to the sea, they caught sight of Tom Bakewell rushing up the road with a portmanteau on his shoulders, and, some distance behind him, discerned Adrian.

'It's all right!' shouted Richard, and ran off to meet him, and never left his hand till he had hauled him up, firing questions at him all the way, to where Lucy stood.

'Lucy! this is Adrian, my cousin.'——Isn't he an angel? his eyes seemed to add; while Lucy's clearly answered, 'That he is!'

The full-bodied angel ceremoniously bowed to her, and acted with reserved unction the benefactor he saw in their greetings. 'I think we are not strangers,' he was good enough to remark, and very quickly let them know he had not breakfasted; on hearing which they hurried him into the house, and Lucy put herself in motion to have him served.

'Dear old Rady,' said Richard, tugging at his hand again, 'how glad I am you've come! I don't mind telling you we've been horribly wretched.'

'Six, seven, eight, nine eggs,' was Adrian's comment on a survey of the breakfast-table.

'Why wouldn't he write? Why didn't he answer one of my letters? But here you are, so I don't mind

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now. He wants to see us, does he? We'll go up to-night. I've a match on at eleven; my little yacht—I've called her the Blandish—against Fred Currie's Begum. I shall beat, but whether I do or not, we'll go up to-night. What's the news? What are they all doing?'

'My dear boy!' Adrian returned, sitting comfortably down, 'let me put myself a little more on an equal footing with you before I undertake to reply. Half that number of eggs will be sufficient for an unmarried man, and then we'll talk. They're all very well, as well as I can recollect after the shaking my total vacuity has had this morning. I came over by the first boat, and the sea, the sea has made me love mother earth, and desire of her fruits.'

Richard fretted restlessly opposite his cool relative.

'Adrian! what did he say when he heard of it? I want to know exactly what words he said.'

'Well says the sage, my son! "Speech is the small change of Silence." He said less than I do.'

'That's how he took it!' cried Richard, and plunged in meditation.

Soon the table was cleared, and laid out afresh, and Lucy preceded the maid bearing eggs on the tray, and sat down unbonneted, and like a thorough-bred housewife, to pour out the tea for him.

'Now we'll commence,' said Adrian, tapping his egg with meditative cheerfulness; but his expression soon changed to one of pain, all the more alarming for his benevolent efforts to conceal it. Could it be possible the egg was bad? oh, horror! Lucy watched him, and waited in trepidation.

'This egg has boiled three minutes and three quarters,' he observed, ceasing to contemplate it.

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'Dear, dear!' said Lucy, 'I boiled them myself exactly that time. Richard likes them so. And you like them hard, Mr. Harley?'

'On the contrary, I like them soft. Two minutes and a half, or three-quarters at the outside. An egg should never rashly verge upon hardness — never. Three minutes is the excess of temerity.'

'If Richard had told me! If I had only known!' the lovely little hostess interjected ruefully, biting her lip.

'We mustn't expect him to pay attention to such matters,' said Adrian, trying to smile.

'Hang it! there are more eggs in the house,' cried Richard, and pulled savagely at the bell.

Lucy jumped up, saying, 'Oh, yes! I will go and boil some exactly the time you like. Pray let me go, Mr. Harley.'

Adrian restrained her departure with a motion of his hand. 'No,' he said, 'I will be ruled by Richard's tastes, and Heaven grant me his digestion!'

Lucy threw a sad look at Richard, who stretched on a sofa, and left the burden of the entertainment entirely to her. The eggs were a melancholy beginning, but her ardour to please Adrian would not be damped, and she deeply admired his resignation. If she failed in pleasing this glorious herald of peace, no matter by what small misadventure, she apprehended calamity; so there sat this fair dove with brows at work above her serious smiling blue eyes, covertly studying every aspect of the plump-faced epicure, that she might learn to propitiate him. 'He shall not think me timid and stupid,' thought this brave girl, and indeed Adrian was astonished to find that she could both chat and be

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useful, as well as look ornamental. When he had finished one egg, behold, two fresh ones came in, boiled according to his prescription. She had quietly given her orders to the maid, and he had them without fuss. Possibly his look of dismay at the offending eggs had not been altogether involuntary, and her woman's instinct, inexperienced as she was, may have told her that he had come prepared to be not very well satisfied with anything in Love's cottage. There was mental faculty in those pliable brows to see through, and combat, an unwitting wise youth.

How much she had achieved already she partly divined when Adrian said: 'I think now I'm in case to answer your questions, my dear boy—thanks to Mrs. Richard,' and he bowed to her his first direct acknowledgment of her position. Lucy thrilled with pleasure.

'Ah!' cried Richard, and settled easily on his back.

'To begin, the Pilgrim has lost his Note-book, and has been persuaded to offer a reward which shall maintain the happy finder thereof in an asylum for life. Benson — superlative Benson — has turned his shoulders upon Raynham. None know whither he has departed. It is believed that the sole surviving member of the sect of the Shaddock-Dogmatists is under a total eclipse of Woman.'

'Benson gone?' Richard exclaimed. 'What a tremendous time it seems since I left Raynham!'

'So it is, my dear boy. The honeymoon is Mahomet's minute; or say, the Persian King's water-pail that you read of in the story: You dip your head in it, and when you draw it out, you discover that you have lived a

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life. To resume: your uncle Algernon still roams in pursuit of the lost one—I should say, hops. Your uncle Hippias has a new and most perplexing symptom; a determination of bride-cake to the nose. Ever since your generous present to him, though he declares he never consumed a morsel of it, he has been under the distressing illusion that his nose is enormous, and I assure you he exhibits quite a maidenly timidity in following it—through a doorway, for instance. He complains of its terrible weight. I have conceived that Benson invisible might be sitting on it. His hand, and the doctor's, are in hourly consultation with it, but I fear it will not grow smaller. The Pilgrim has begotten upon it a new Aphorism: that Size is a matter of opinion.'

'Poor uncle Hippy!' said Richard, 'I wonder he doesn't believe in magic. There's nothing supernatural to rival the wonderful sensations he does believe in. Good God! fancy coming to that!'

'I'm sure I'm very sorry,' Lucy protested, 'but I can't help laughing.'

Charming to the wise youth her pretty laughter sounded.

'The Pilgrim has your notion, Richard. Whom does he not forestall? Confirmed dyspepsia is the apparatus of illusions,' and he accuses the Ages that put faith in sorcery, of universal indigestion, which may have been the case, owing to their infamous cookery. He says again, if you remember, that our own Age is travelling back to darkness and ignorance through dyspepsia. He lays the seat of wisdom in the centre of our system, Mrs. Richard: for which reason you will understand how sensible I am of the vast obligation

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I am under to you at the present moment, for your especial care of mine.'

Richard looked on at Lucy's little triumph, attributing Adrian's subjugation to her beauty and sweetness. She had latterly received a great many compliments on that score, which she did not care to hear, and Adrian's homage to a practical quality was far pleasanter to the young wife, who shrewdly guessed that her beauty would not help her much in the struggle she had now to maintain. Adrian continuing to lecture on the excelling virtues of wise cookery, a thought struck her: Where, where had she tossed Mrs. Berry's book?

'So that's all about the home people?' said Richard.

'All!' replied Adrian. 'Or stay: you know Clare's going to be married? Not? Your Aunt Helen——'

'Oh, bother my Aunt Helen! What do you think she had the impertinence to write—but never mind! Is it to Ralph?'

'Your Aunt Helen, I was going to say, my dear boy, is an extraordinary woman. It was from her originally that the Pilgrim first learnt to call the female the practical animal. He studies us all, you know. "The Pilgrim's Scrip" is the abstract portraiture of his surrounding relatives. Well, your Aunt Helen——'

'Mrs. Doria Battledoria!' laughed Richard.

'——being foiled in a little pet scheme of her own —call it a System if you like—of some ten or fifteen years' standing, with regard to Miss Clare——'

'The fair Shuttlecockiana!'

'——instead of fretting like a man, and questioning Providence, and turning herself and everybody else inside out, and seeing the world upside down, what does the practical animal do? She wanted to marry

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her to somebody she couldn't marry her to, so she resolved instantly to marry her to somebody she could marry her to: and as old gentlemen enter into these transactions with the practical animal the most readily, she fixed upon an old gentleman; an unmarried old gentleman, a rich old gentleman, and now a captive old gentleman. The ceremony takes place in about a week from the present time. No doubt you will receive your invitation in a day or two.'

'And that cold, icy, wretched Clare has consented to marry an old man!' groaned Richard. 'I'll put a stop to that when I go to town.'

Richard got up and strode about the room. Then he bethought him it was time to go on board and make preparations.

'I'm off,' he said. 'Adrian, you'll take her. She goes in the Empress, Mountfalcon's vessel. He starts us. A little schooner-yacht—such a beauty! I'll have one like her some day. Good-bye, darling!' he whispered to Lucy, and his hand and eyes lingered on her, and hers on him, seeking to make up for the priceless kiss they were debarred from. But she quickly looked away from him as he held her:—Adrian stood silent: his brows were up, and his mouth dubiously contracted. He spoke at last.

'Go on the water?'

'Yes. It's only to St. Helen's. Short and sharp.'

'Do you grudge me the nourishment my poor system has just received, my son?'

'Oh, bother your system! Put on your hat, and come along. I'll put you on board in my boat.'

'Richard! I have already paid the penalty of them who are condemned to come to an island. I will go

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with you to the edge of the sea, and I will meet you there when you return, and take up the Tale of the Tritons: but, though I forfeit the pleasure of Mrs. Richard's company, I refuse to quit the land.'

'Yes, oh, Mr. Harley!' Lucy broke from her husband, 'and I will stay with you, if you please. I don't want to go among those people, and we can see it all from the shore. Dearest! I don't want to go. You don't mind? Of course, I will go if you wish, but I would so much rather stay'; and she lengthened her plea in her attitude and look to melt the discontent she saw gathering.

Adrian protested that she had much better go; that he could amuse himself very well till their return, and so forth; but she had schemes in her pretty head, and held to it to be allowed to stay in spite of Lord Mountfalcon's disappointment, cited by Richard, and at the great risk of vexing her darling, as she saw. Richard pished, and glanced contemptuously at Adrian. He gave way ungraciously.

'There, do as you like. Get your things ready to leave this evening. No, I'm not angry.'—Who could be? he seemed as he looked up from her modest fondling to ask Adrian, and seized the indemnity of a kiss on her forehead, which, however, did not immediately disperse the shade of annoyance he felt.

'Good heavens!' he exclaimed. 'Such a day as this, and a fellow refuses to come on the water! Well, come along to the edge of the sea.' Adrian's angelic quality had quite worn off to him. He never thought of devoting himself to make the most of the material there was: but somebody else did, and that fair somebody succeeded wonderfully in a few short hours.

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She induced Adrian to reflect that the baronet had only to see her, and the family muddle would be smoothed at once. He came to it by degrees; still the gradations were rapid. Her manner he liked; she was certainly a nice picture: best of all, she was sensible. He forgot the farmer's niece in her, she was so very sensible. She appeared really to understand that it was a woman's duty to know how to cook.

But the difficulty was, by what means the baronet could be brought to consent to see her. He had not yet consented to see his son, and Adrian, spurred by Lady Blandish, had ventured something in coming down. He was not inclined to venture more. The small debate in his mind ended by his throwing the burden on time. Time would bring the matter about. Christians as well as Pagans are in the habit of phrasing this excuse for folding their arms; 'forgetful,' says 'The Pilgrim's Scrip,' 'that the Devil's imps enter into no such armistice.'

As she loitered along the shore with her amusing companion, Lucy had many things to think of. There was her darling's match. The yachts were started by pistol-shot by Lord Mountfalcon on board the Empress, and her little heart beat after Richard's straining sails. Then there was the strangeness of walking with a relative of Richard's, one who had lived by his side so long. And the thought that perhaps this night she would have to appear before the dreaded father of her husband.

'O Mr. Harley!' she said, 'is it true—are we to go to-night? And me,' she faltered, 'will he see me?'

'Ah! that is what I wanted to talk to you about,' said Adrian. 'I made some reply to our dear boy

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which he has slightly misinterpreted. Our second person plural is liable to misconstruction by an ardent mind. I said "see you," and he supposed—now, Mrs. Richard, I am sure you will understand me. Just at present perhaps it would be adviseable — when the father and son have settled their accounts, the daughter-in-law can't be a debtor. . . .'

Lucy threw up her blue eyes. A half-cowardly delight at the chance of a respite from the awful interview made her quickly apprehensive.

'O Mr. Harley! you think he should go alone first?'

'Well, that is my notion. But the fact is, he is such an excellent husband that I fancy it will require more than a man's power of persuasion to get him to go.'

'But I will persuade him, Mr. Harley.'

'Perhaps, if you would . . .'

'There is nothing I would not do for his happiness,' murmured Lucy.

The wise youth pressed her hand with lymphatic approbation. They walked on till the yachts had rounded the point.

'Is it to-night, Mr. Harley?' she asked with some trouble in her voice now that her darling was out of sight.

'I don't imagine your eloquence even will get him to leave you to-night,' Adrian replied gallantly. 'Besides, I must speak for myself. To achieve the passage to an island is enough for one day. No necessity exists for any hurry, except in the brain of that impetuous boy. You must correct it, Mrs. Richard. Men are made to be managed, and women are born managers. Now, if you were to let him know that you don't want to go to-night, and let him

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guess, after a day or two, that you would very much rather . . . you might affect a peculiar repugnance. By taking it on yourself, you see, this wild young man will not require such frightful efforts of persuasion. Both his father and he are exceedingly delicate subjects, and his father unfortunately is not in a position to be managed directly. It's a strange office to propose to you, but it appears to devolve upon you to manage the father through the son. Prodigal having made his peace, you, who have done all the work from a distance, naturally come into the circle of the paternal smile, knowing it due to you. I see no other way. If Richard suspects that his father objects for the present to welcome his daughter-in-law, hostilities will be continued, the breach will be widened, bad will grow to worse, and I see no end to it.'

Adrian looked in her face, as much as to say: Now are you capable of this piece of heroism? And it did seem hard to her that she should have to tell Richard she shrank from any trial. But the proposition chimed in with her fears and her wishes: she thought the wise youth very wise: the poor child was not insensible to his flattery, and the subtler flattery of making herself in some measure a sacrifice to the home she had disturbed. She agreed to simulate as Adrian had suggested.

Victory is the commonest heritage of the hero, and when Richard came on shore proclaiming that the Blandish had beaten the Begum by seven minutes and three-quarters, he was hastily kissed and congratulated by his bride with her fingers among the leaves of Dr. Kitchener, and anxiously questioned about wine.

'Dearest! Mr. Harley wants to stay with us a little,

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and he thinks we ought not to go immediately—that is, before he has had some letters, and I feel . . . I would so much rather . . .'

'Ah! that's it, you coward!' said Richard. 'Well, then, to-morrow. We had a splendid race. Did you see us?'

'Oh, yes! I saw you and was sure my darling would win.' And again she threw on him the cold water of that solicitude about wine. 'Mr. Harley must have the best, you know, and we never drink it, and I'm so silly, I don't know good wine, and if you would send Tom where he can get *good* wine. I have seen to the dinner.'

'So that's why you didn't come to meet me?'

'Pardon me, darling.'

'Well, I do, but Mountfalcon doesn't, and Lady Judith thinks you ought to have been there.'

'Ah, but my heart was with you!'

Richard put his hand to feel for the little heart: her eyelids softened, and she ran away.

It is to say much of the dinner that Adrian found no fault with it, and was in perfect good humour at the conclusion of the service. He did not abuse the wine they were able to procure for him, which was also much. The coffee, too, had the honour of passing without comment. These were sound first steps toward the conquest of an epicure, and as yet Cupid did not grumble.

After coffee they strolled out to see the sun set from Lady Judith's grounds. The wind had dropped. The clouds had rolled from the zenith, and ranged in amphitheatre with distant flushed bodies over sea and land: Titanic crimson head and chest rising from

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the wave faced Hyperion falling. There hung Briareus with deep-indented trunk and ravined brows, stretching all his hands up to unattainable blue summits. North-west the range had a rich white glow, as if shining to the moon, and westward, streams of amber, melting into upper rose, shot out from the dipping disk.

'What Sandoe calls the passion-flower of heaven,' said Richard under his breath to Adrian, who was serenely chanting Greek hexameters, and answered, in the swing of the cæsura, 'He might as well have said cauliflower.'

Lady Judith, with a black lace veil tied over her head, met them in the walk. She was tall and dark; dark-haired, dark-eyed, sweet and persuasive in her accent and manner. 'A second edition of the Blandish,' thinks Adrian. She welcomed him as one who had claims on her affability. She kissed Lucy protectingly, and remarking on the wonders of the evening, appropriated her husband. Adrian and Lucy found themselves walking behind them.

The sun was under. All the spaces of the sky were alight, and Richard's fancy flamed.

'So you're not intoxicated with your immense triumph this morning?' said Lady Judith.

'Don't laugh at me. When it's over I feel ashamed of the trouble I've taken. Look at that glory!—I'm sure you despise me for it.'

'Was I not there to applaud you? I only think such energies should be turned into some definitely useful channel. But you must not go into the Army.'

'What else can I do?'

'You are fit for so much that is better.'

'I never can be anything like Austin.'

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'But I think you can do more.'

'Well I thank you for thinking it, Lady Judith. Something I will do. A man must deserve to live, as you say.'

'Sauces,' Adrian was heard to articulate distinctly in the rear, 'Sauces are the top tree of this science. A woman who has mastered sauces sits on the apex of civilization.'

Briareus reddened duskily seaward. The West was all a burning rose.

'How can men see such sights as those, and live idle?' Richard resumed. 'I feel ashamed of asking my men to work for me.—Or I feel so now.'

'Not when you 're racing the Begum, I think. There 's no necessity for you to turn democrat like Austin. Do you write now?'

'No. What is writing like mine? It doesn't deceive me. I know it 's only the excuse I 'm making to myself for remaining idle. I haven't written a line since —lately.'

'Because you are so happy.'

'No, not because of that. Of course I 'm very happy . . .' He did not finish.

Vague, shapeless ambition had replaced love in yonder skies. No Scientific Humanist was by to study the natural development, and guide him. This lady would hardly be deemed a very proper guide to the undirected energies of the youth, yet they had established relations of that nature. She was five years older than he, and a woman, which may explain her serene presumption.

The cloud-giants had broken up: a brawny shoulder smouldered over the sea.

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'We'll work together in town, at all events,' said Richard. 'Why can't we go about together at night and find out people who want help?'

Lady Judith smiled, and only corrected his nonsense by saying, 'I think we mustn't be too romantic. You will become a knight-errant, I suppose. You have the characteristics of one.'

'Especially at breakfast,' Adrian's unnecessarily emphatic gastronomical lessons to the young wife here came in.

'You must be our champion,' continued Lady Judith: 'the rescuer and succourer of distressed dames and damsels. We want one badly.'

'You do,' said Richard earnestly: 'from what I hear: from what I know!' His thoughts flew off with him as knight-errant hailed shrilly at exceeding critical moments by distressed dames and damsels. Images of airy towers hung around. His fancy performed miraculous feats. The towers crumbled. The stars grew larger, seemed to throb with lustre. His fancy crumbled with the towers of the air, his heart gave a leap, he turned to Lucy.

'My darling! what have you been doing?' And as if to compensate her for his little knight-errant infidelity, he pressed very tenderly to her.

'We have been engaged in a charming conversation on domestic cookery,' interposed Adrian.

'Cookery! such an evening as this?' His face was a handsome likeness of Hippias at the presentation of bride-cake.

'Dearest! you know it's very useful,' Lucy mirthfully pleaded.

'Indeed I quite agree with you, child,' said Lady

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Judith, 'and I think you have the laugh of us. I certainly will learn to cook some day.'

'Woman's mission, in so many words,' ejaculated Adrian.

'And pray, what is man's?'

'To taste thereof, and pronounce thereupon.'

'Let us give it up to them,' said Lady Judith to Richard. 'You and I never will make so delightful and beautifully balanced a world of it.'

Richard appeared to have grown perfectly willing to give everything up to the fair face, his bridal Hesper.

Next day Lucy had to act the coward anew, and as she did so, her heart sank to see how painfully it affected him that she should hesitate to go with him to his father. He was patient, gentle; he sat down by her side to appeal to her reason, and used all the arguments he could think of to persuade her.

'If we go together and make him see us both: if he sees he has nothing to be ashamed of in you—rather everything to be proud of; if you are only near him, you will not have to speak a word, and I 'm certain—as certain as that I live—that in a week we shall be settled happily at Raynham. I know my father so well, Lucy. Nobody knows him but I.'

Lucy asked whether Mr. Harley did not.

'Adrian? Not a bit. Adrian only knows a part of people, Lucy; and not the best part.'

Lucy was disposed to think more highly of the object of her conquest.

'Is it he that has been frightening you, Lucy?'

'No, no, Richard; oh, dear no!' she cried, and

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looked at him more tenderly because she was not quite truthful.

'He doesn't know my father at all,' said Richard. But Lucy had another opinion of the wise youth, and secretly maintained it. She could not be won to imagine the baronet a man of human mould, generous, forgiving, full of passionate love at heart, as Richard tried to picture him, and thought him, now that he beheld him again through Adrian's embassy. To her he was that awful figure, shrouded by the midnight. 'Why are you so harsh?' she had heard Richard cry more than once. She was sure that Adrian must be right.

'Well, I tell you I won't go without you,' said Richard, and Lucy begged for a little more time.

Cupid now began to grumble, and with cause. Adrian positively refused to go on the water unless that element were smooth as a plate. The South-west still joked boisterously at any comparison of the sort; the days were magnificent; Richard had yachting engagements; and Lucy always petitioned to stay to keep Adrian company, conceiving it her duty as hostess. Arguing with Adrian was an absurd idea. If Richard hinted at his retaining Lucy, the wise youth would remark: 'It's a wholesome interlude to your extremely Cupidinous behaviour, my dear boy.'

Richard asked his wife what they could possibly find to talk about.

'All manner of things,' said Lucy; 'not only cookery. He is so amusing, though he does make fun of "The Pilgrim's Scrip," and I think he ought not. And then, do you know, darling—you won't think me vain?—I think he is beginning to like me a little.'

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CHAPTER XXXIV
Conquest of an Epicure

Richard laughed at the humble mind of his Beauty.

'Doesn't everybody like you, admire you? Doesn't Lord Mountfalcon, and Mr. Morton, and Lady Judith?'

'But he is one of your family, Richard.'

'And they all will, if she isn't a coward.'

'Ah, no!' she sighs, and is chidden.

The conquest of an epicure, or any young wife's conquest beyond her husband, however loyally devised for their mutual happiness, may be costly to her. Richard in his hours of excitement was thrown very much with Lady Judith. He consulted her regarding what he termed Lucy's cowardice. Lady Judith said: 'I think she's wrong, but you must learn to humour little women.'

'Then would you advise me to go up alone?' he asked, with a cloudy forehead.

'What else can you do? Be reconciled yourself as quickly as you can. You can't drag her like a captive, you know?'

It is not pleasant for a young husband, fancying his bride the peerless flower of Creation, to learn that he must humour a little woman in her. It was revolting to Richard.

'What I fear,' he said, 'is, that my father will make it smooth with me, and not acknowledge her: so that whenever I go to him, I shall have to leave her, and tit for tat—an abominable existence, like a ball on a billiard-table. I won't bear that ignominy. And this I know, I know! she might prevent it at once, if she would only be brave, and face it. You, you, Lady Judith, you wouldn't be a coward?'

'Where my old lord tells me to go, I go,' the lady coldly replied. 'There's not much merit in that.

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Pray, don't cite me. Women are born cowards, you know.'

'But I love the women who are not cowards.'

'The little thing—your wife has not refused to go?'

'No—but tears! Who can stand tears?'

Lucy had come to drop them. Unaccustomed to have his will thwarted, and urgent where he saw the thing to do so clearly, the young husband had spoken strong words: and she, who knew that she would have given her life by inches for him: who knew that she was playing a part for his happiness, and hiding for his sake the nature that was worthy his esteem; the poor little martyr had been weak a moment.

She had Adrian's support. The wise youth was very comfortable. He liked the air of the Island, and he liked being petted. 'A nice little woman! a very nice little woman!' Tom Bakewell heard him murmur to himself according to a habit he had; and his air of rather succulent patronage as he walked or sat beside the innocent Beauty, with his head thrown back and a smile that seemed always to be in secret communion with his marked abdominal prominence, showed that she was gaining part of what she played for. Wise youths who buy their loves, are not unwilling, when opportunity offers, to try and obtain the commodity for nothing. Examinations of her hand, as for some occult purpose, and unctuous pattings of the same, were not infrequent. Adrian waxed now and then Anacreontic in his compliments. Lucy would say: 'That 's worse than Lord Mountfalcon.'

'Better English than the noble lord deigns to employ—allow that?' quoth Adrian.

'He is very kind,' said Lucy.

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'To all, save to our noble vernacular,' added Adrian. 'He seems to scent a rival to his dignity there.'

It may be that Adrian scented a rival to his lymphatic emotions.

'We are at our ease here in excellent society,' he wrote to Lady Blandish. 'I am bound to confess that the Huron has a happy fortune, or a superlative instinct. Blindfold he has seized upon a suitable mate. She can look at a lord, and cook for an epicure. Besides Dr. Kitchener, she reads and comments on "The Pilgrim's Scrip." The "Love" chapter, of course, takes her fancy. That picture of Woman, "*Drawn by Reverence and coloured by Love,*" she thinks beautiful, and repeats it, tossing up pretty eyes. Also the lover's petition: "*Give me purity to be worthy the good in her, and grant her patience to reach the good in me.*" 'Tis quite taking to hear her lisp it. Be sure that I am repeating the petition! I make her read me her choice passages. She has not a bad voice.

'The Lady Judith I spoke of is Austin's Miss Menteith, married to the incapable old Lord Felle, or Fellow, as the wits here call him. Lord Mountfalcon is his cousin, and her—what? She has been trying to find out, but they have both got over their perplexity, and act respectively the bad man reproved and the chaste counsellor; a position in which our young couple found them, and haply diverted its perils. They have quite taken them in hand. Lady Judith undertakes to cure the fair Papist of a pretty, modest trick of frowning and blushing when addressed, and his lordship directs the exuberant energies of the original man. 'Tis thus we fulfil our destinies, and are content. Sometimes they change pupils; my lord educates the

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little dame, and my lady the hope of Raynham. Joy and blessings unto all! as the German poet sings. Lady Judith accepted the hand of her decrepit lord that she might be of potent service to her fellow-creatures. Austin, you know, had great hopes of her.

'I have for the first time in my career a field of lords to study. I think it is not without meaning that I am introduced to it by a yeoman's niece. The language of the two social extremes is similar. I find it to consist in an instinctively lavish use of vowels and adjectives. My lord and Farmer Blaize speak the same tongue, only my lord's has lost its backbone, and is limp, though fluent. Their pursuits are identical; but that one has money, or, as the Pilgrim terms it, *vantage*, and the other has not. Their ideas seem to have a special relationship in the peculiarity of stopping where they have begun. Young Tom Blaize with *vantage* would be Lord Mountfalcon. Even in the character of their parasites I see a resemblance, though I am bound to confess that the Hon. Peter Brayder, who is my lord's parasite, is by no means noxious.

'This sounds dreadfully democrat. Pray, don't be alarmed. The discovery of the affinity between the two extremes of the Royal British Oak has made me thrice conservative. I see now that the national love of a lord is less subservience than a form of self-love; putting a gold-lace hat on one's image, as it were, to bow to it. I see, too, the admirable wisdom of our system:—could there be a finer balance of power than in a community where men intellectually nil, have lawful vantage and a gold-lace hat on? How soothing it is to intellect—that noble rebel, as the Pilgrim has it—to stand, and bow, and know itself superior!

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This exquisite compensation maintains the balance: whereas that period anticipated by the Pilgrim, when science shall have produced an *intellectual aristocracy*, is indeed horrible to contemplate. For what despotism is so black as one the mind cannot challenge? 'Twill be an iron Age. Wherefore, madam, I cry, and shall continue to cry: "*Vive* Lord Mountfalcon! long may he sip his Burgundy! long may the bacon-fed carry him on their shoulders!"

'Mr. Morton (who does me the honour to call me Young Mephisto, and Socrates missed) leaves to-morrow to get Master Ralph out of a scrape. Our Richard has just been elected member of a Club for the promotion of nausea. Is he happy? you ask. As much so as one who has had the misfortune to obtain what he wanted can be. Speed is his passion. He races from point to point. In emulation of Leander and Don Juan, he swam, I hear, to the opposite shores the other day, or some world-shaking feat of the sort: himself the Hero whom he went to meet: or, as they who pun say, his Hero was a Bet. A pretty little domestic episode occurred this morning. He finds her abstracted in the fire of his caresses: she turns shy and seeks solitude: green jealousy takes hold of him: he lies in wait, and discovers her with his new rival —a veteran edition of the culinary Doctor! Blind to the Doctor's great national services, deaf to her wild music, he grasps the intruder, dismembers him, and performs upon him the treatment he has recommended for dressed cucumber. Tears and shrieks accompany the descent of the gastronome. Down she rushes to secure the cherished fragments: he follows: they find him, true to his character, alighted and straggling over

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a bed of blooming flowers. Yet ere a fairer flower can gather him, a heel black as Pluto stamps him into earth, flowers and all:—happy burial! Pathetic tribute to his merit is watering his grave, when by saunters my Lord Mountfalcon. "What's the mattah?" says his lordship, soothing his moustache. They break apart, and 'tis left to me to explain from the window. My lord looks shocked, Richard is angry with her for having to be ashamed of himself, Beauty dries her eyes, and after a pause of general foolishness, the business of life is resumed. I may add that the Doctor has just been dug up, and we are busy, in the enemy's absence, renewing old Æson with enchanted threads. By the way, a Papist priest has blest them.'

A month had passed when Adrian wrote this letter. He was very comfortable; so of course he thought Time was doing his duty. Not a word did he say of Richard's return, and for some reason or other neither Richard or Lucy spoke of it now.

Lady Blandish wrote back: 'His father thinks he has refused to come to him. By your utter silence on the subject, I fear that it must be so. Make him come. Bring him by force. *Insist* on his coming. Is he mad? He must come *at once*.'

To this Adrian replied, after a contemplative comfortable lapse of a day or two, which might be laid to his efforts to adopt the lady's advice, 'The point is that the half man declines to come without the whole man. The terrible question of sex is our obstruction.'

Lady Blandish was in despair. She had no positive assurance that the baronet would see his son; the mask put them all in the dark; but she thought she saw in Sir Austin irritation that the offender, at least

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when the opening to come and make his peace seemed to be before him, should let days and weeks go by. She saw through the mask sufficiently not to have any hope of his consenting to receive the couple at present; she was sure that his equanimity was fictitious; but she pierced no farther, or she might have started and asked herself, Is this the heart of a woman?

The lady at last wrote to Richard. She said: 'Come instantly, and come alone.' Then Richard, against his judgement, gave way. 'My father is not the man I thought him!' he exclaimed sadly, and Lucy felt his eyes saying to her: 'And you, too, are not the woman I thought you.' Nothing could the poor little heart reply but strain to his bosom and sleeplessly pray in his arms all the night.

CHAPTER XXXV

Clare's Marriage

Three weeks after Richard arrived in town, his cousin Clare was married, under the blessings of her energetic mother, and with the approbation of her kinsfolk, to the husband that had been expeditiously chosen for her. The gentleman, though something more than twice the age of his bride, had no idea of approaching senility for many long connubial years to come. Backed by his tailor and his hairdresser, he presented no such bad figure at the altar, and none would have thought that he was an ancient admirer of his bride's mama, as certainly none knew he had lately proposed

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for Mrs. Doria before there was any question of her daughter. These things were secrets; and the elastic and happy appearance of Mr. John Todhunter did not betray them at the altar. Perhaps he would rather have married the mother. He was a man of property, well born, tolerably well educated, and had, when Mrs. Doria rejected him for the first time, the reputation of being a fool—which a wealthy man may have in his youth; but as he lived on, and did not squander his money—amassed it, on the contrary, and did not seek to go into Parliament, and did other negative wise things, the world's opinion, as usual, veered completely round, and John Todhunter was esteemed a shrewd, sensible man—only not brilliant; that he was brilliant, could not be said of him. In fact, the man could hardly talk, and it was a fortunate provision that no impromptu deliveries were required of him in the marriage-service.

Mrs. Doria had her own reasons for being in a hurry. She had discovered something of the strange impassive nature of her child; not from any confession of Clare's, but from signs a mother can read when her eyes are not resolutely shut. She saw with alarm and anguish that Clare had fallen into the pit she had been digging for her so laboriously. In vain she entreated the baronet to break the disgraceful, and, as she said, illegal alliance his son had contracted. Sir Austin would not even stop the little pension to poor Berry. 'At least you will do that, Austin,' she begged pathetically. 'You will show your sense of that horrid woman's conduct?' He refused to offer up any victim to console her. Then Mrs. Doria told him her thoughts, —and when an outraged energetic lady is finally brought

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to exhibit these painfully hoarded treasures, she does not use half words as a medium. His System, and his conduct generally, were denounced to him, without analysis. She let him understand that the world laughed at him; and he heard this from her at a time when his mask was still soft and liable to be acted on by his nerves. 'You are weak, Austin! weak, I tell you!' she said, and, like all angry and self-interested people, prophecy came easy to her. In her heart she accused him of her own fault, in imputing to him the wreck of her project. The baronet allowed her to revel in the proclamation of a dire future, and quietly counselled her to keep apart from him, which his sister assured him she would do.

But to be passive in calamity is the province of no woman. Mark the race at any hour. 'What revolution and hubbub does not that little instrument, the needle, avert from us!' says 'The Pilgrim's Scrip.' Alas, that in calamity women cannot stitch! Now that she saw Clare wanted other than iron, it struck her she must have a husband, and be made secure as a woman and a wife. This seemed the thing to do: and, as she had forced the iron down Clare's throat, so she forced the husband, and Clare gulped at the latter as she had at the former. On the very day that Mrs. Doria had this new track shaped out before her, John Todhunter called at the Foreys. 'Old John!' sang out Mrs. Doria, 'show him up to me. I want to see him particularly.' He sat with her alone. He was a man multitudes of women would have married—whom will they not?—and who would have married any presentable woman: but women do want asking, and John never had the word. The rape of such men

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is left to the practical animal. So John sat alone with his old flame. He had become resigned to her perpetual lamentation and living Suttee for his defunct rival. But, ha! what meant those soft glances now—addressed to him? His tailor and his hairdresser gave youth to John, but they had not the art to bestow upon him distinction, and an undistinguished man what woman looks at? John was an indistinguishable man. For that reason he was dry wood to a soft glance. And now she said: 'It is time you should marry; and you are the man to be the guide and helper of a young woman, John. You are well preserved—younger than most of the young men of our day. You are eminently domestic, a good son, and will be a good husband and good father. Some one you must marry.—What do you think of Clare for a wife for you?'

At first John Todhunter thought it would be very much like his marrying a baby. However, he listened to it, and that was enough for Mrs. Doria.

She went down to John's mother, and consulted with her on the propriety of the scheme of wedding her daughter to John in accordance with his proposition. Mrs. Todhunter's jealousy of any disturbing force in the influence she held over her son Mrs. Doria knew to be one of the causes of John's remaining constant to the impression she had aforetime produced on him. She spoke so kindly of John, and laid so much stress on the ingrained obedience and passive disposition of her daughter, that Mrs. Todhunter was led to admit she did think it almost time John should be seeking a mate, and that he—all things considered—would hardly find a fitter one. And this,

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CHAPTER XXXV Clare's Marriage

John Todhunter — old John no more—heard to his amazement when, a day or two subsequently, he instanced the probable disapproval of his mother.

The match was arranged. Mrs. Doria did the wooing. It consisted in telling Clare that she had come to years when marriage was desirable, and that she had fallen into habits of moping which might have the worse effect on her future life, as it had on her present health and appearance, and which a husband would cure. Richard was told by Mrs. Doria that Clare had instantaneously consented to accept Mr. John Todhunter as lord of her days, and with more than obedience—with alacrity. At all events, when Richard spoke to Clare, the strange passive creature did not admit constraint on her inclinations. Mrs. Doria allowed Richard to speak to her. She laughed at his futile endeavours to undo her work, and the boyish sentiments he uttered on the subject. 'Let us see, child,' she said, 'let us see which turns out the best; a marriage of passion, or a marriage of common sense.'

Heroic efforts were not wanting to arrest the union. Richard made repeated journeys to Hounslow, where Ralph was quartered, and if Ralph could have been persuaded to carry off a young lady who did not love him, from the bridegroom her mother averred she did love, Mrs. Doria might have been defeated. But Ralph in his cavalry quarters was cooler than Ralph in the Bursley meadows. 'Women are oddities, Dick,' he remarked, running a finger right and left along his upper lip. 'Best leave them to their own freaks. She 's a dear girl, though she doesn't talk: I like her for that. If she cared for me I 'd go the race. She

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never did. It's no use asking a girl twice. *She* knows whether she cares a fig for a fellow.'

The hero quitted him with some contempt. As Ralph Morton was a young man, and he had determined that John Todhunter was an old man, he sought another private interview with Clare, and, getting her alone, said: 'Clare, I've come to you for the last time. Will you marry Ralph Morton?'

To which Clare replied, 'I cannot marry two husbands, Richard.'

'Will you refuse to marry this old man?'

'I must do as mama wishes.'

'Then you're going to marry an old man—a man you don't love, and can't love! Oh, good God! do you know what you're doing?' He flung about in a fury. 'Do you know what it is? Clare!,' he caught her two hands violently, 'have you any idea of the horror you're going to commit?'

She shrank a little at his vehemence, but neither blushed nor stammered: answering: 'I see nothing wrong in doing what mama thinks right, Richard.'

'Your mother! I tell you it's an infamy, Clare! It's a miserable sin! I tell you, if I had done such a thing I would not live an hour after it. And coldly to prepare for it! to be busy about your dresses! They told me when I came in that you were with the milliner. To be smiling over the horrible outrage! decorating yourself! . . .'

'Dear Richard,' said Clare, 'you will make me very unhappy.'

'That one of my blood should be so debased!' he cried, brushing angrily at his face. 'Unhappy! I beg you to feel for yourself, Clare. But I suppose,' and

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he said it scornfully, 'girls don't feel this sort of shame.'

She grew a trifle paler.

'Next to mama, I would wish to please you, dear Richard.'

'Have you no will of your own?' he exclaimed.

She looked at him softly; a look he interpreted for the meekness he detested in her.

'No, I believe you have none!' he added. 'And what can I do? I can't step forward and stop this accursed marriage. If you would but say a word I would save you; but you tie my hands. And they expect me to stand by and see it done!'

'Will you not be there, Richard?' said Clare, following the question with her soft eyes. It was the same voice that had so thrilled him on his marriage-morn.

'Oh, my darling Clare!' he cried in the kindest way he had ever used to her, 'if you knew how I feel this!' and now as he wept she wept, and came insensibly into his arms. 'My darling Clare!' he repeated.

She said nothing, but seemed to shudder, weeping.

'You *will* do it, Clare? You will be sacrificed? So lovely as you are, too! . . . Clare! you cannot be quite blind. If I dared speak to you, and tell you all. . . . Look up. Can you still consent?'

'I must not disobey mama,' Clare murmured, without looking up from the nest her cheek had made on his bosom.

'Then kiss me for the last time,' said Richard. 'I'll never kiss you after it, Clare'

He bent his head to meet her mouth, and she threw her arms wildly round him, and kissed him convulsively,

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and clung to his lips, shutting her eyes, her face suffused with a burning red.

Then he left her, unaware of the meaning of those passionate kisses.

Argument with Mrs. Doria was like firing paper-pellets against a stone wall. To her indeed the young married hero spoke almost indecorously, and that which his delicacy withheld him from speaking to Clare. He could provoke nothing more responsive from the practical animal than 'Pooh-pooh! Tush, tush! and Fiddle-dedee!'

'Really,' Mrs. Doria said to her intimates, 'that boy's education acts like a disease on him. He cannot regard anything sensibly. He is for ever in some mad excess of his fancy, and what he will come to at last heaven only knows! I sincerely pray that Austin will be able to bear it.'

Threats of prayer, however, that harp upon their sincerity, are not very well worth having. Mrs. Doria had embarked in a practical controversy, as it were, with her brother. Doubtless she did trust he would be able to bear his sorrows to come, but one who has uttered prophecy can barely help hoping to see it fulfilled: she had prophecied much grief to the baronet.

Poor John Todhunter, who would rather have married the mother, and had none of your heroic notions about the sacred necessity for love in marriage, moved as one guiltless of offence, and deserving his happiness. Mrs. Doria shielded him from the hero. To see him smile at Clare's obedient figure, and try not to look paternal, was touching.

Meantime Clare's marriage served one purpose. It completely occupied Richard's mind, and prevented

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him from chafing at the vexation of not finding his father ready to meet him when he came to town. A letter had awaited Adrian at the hotel, which said, 'Detain him till you hear further from me. Take him about with you into every form of society.' No more than that. Adrian had to extemporize, that the baronet had gone down to Wales on pressing business, and would be back in a week or so. For ulterior inventions and devices wherewith to keep the young gentleman in town, he applied to Mrs. Doria. 'Leave him to me,' said Mrs. Doria, 'I'll manage him.' And she did.

'Who can say,' asks 'The Pilgrim's Scrip,' 'when he is not walking a puppet to some woman?'

Mrs. Doria would hear no good of Lucy. 'I believe,' she observed, as Adrian ventured a shrugging protest in her behalf,—'it is my firm opinion, that a scullery-maid would turn any of you men round her little finger—only give her time and opportunity.' By dwelling on the arts of women, she reconciled it to her conscience to do her best to divide the young husband from his wife till it pleased his father they should live their unhallowed union again. Without compunction, or a sense of incongruity, she abused her brother and assisted the fulfilment of his behests.

So the puppets were marshalled by Mrs. Doria, happy, or sad, or indifferent. Quite against his set resolve and the tide of his feelings, Richard found himself standing behind Clare in the church—the very edifice that had witnessed his own marriage, and heard, 'I, Clare Doria, take thee John Pemberton,' clearly pronounced. He stood with black brows dissecting the arts of the tailor and hairdresser on

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unconscious John. The back, and much of the middle, of Mr. Todhunter's head was bald; the back shone like an egg-shell, but across the middle the artist had drawn two long dabs of hair from the sides, and plastered them cunningly, so that all save wilful eyes would have acknowledged the head to be covered. The man's only pretension was to a respectable juvenility. He had a good chest, stout limbs, a face inclined to be jolly. Mrs. Doria had no cause to be put out of countenance at all by the exterior of her son-in-law: nor was she. Her splendid hair and gratified smile made a light in the church. Playing puppets must be an immense pleasure to the practical animal. The Forey bridesmaids, five in number, and one Miss Doria, their cousin, stood as girls do stand at these sacrifices, whether happy, sad, or indifferent; a smile on their lips and tears in attendance. Old Mrs. Todhunter, an exceedingly small ancient woman, was also there. 'I can't have my boy John married without seeing it done,' she said, and throughout the ceremony she was muttering audible encomiums on her John's manly behaviour.

The ring was affixed to Clare's finger; there was no ring lost in this common-sense marriage. The instant the clergyman bade him employ it, John drew the ring out, and dropped it on the finger of the cold passive hand in a business-like way, as one who had studied the matter. Mrs. Doria glanced aside at Richard. Richard observed Clare spread out her fingers that the operation might be the more easily effected.

He did duty in the vestry a few minutes, and then said to his aunt:

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'Now I'll go.'

'You'll come to the breakfast, child? The Foreys——'

He cut her short. 'I've stood for the family, and I'll do no more. I won't pretend to eat and make merry over it.'

'Richard!'

'Good-bye.'

She had attained her object and she wisely gave way.

'Well. Go and kiss Clare, and shake his hand. Pray, pray be civil.'

She turned to Adrian, and said: 'He is going. You must go with him, and find some means of keeping him, or he'll be running off to that woman. Now, no words—go!'

Richard bade Clare farewell. She put up her mouth to him humbly, but he kissed her on the forehead.

'Do not cease to love me,' she said in a quavering whisper in his ear.

Mr. Todhunter stood beaming and endangering the art of the hairdresser with his pocket-handkerchief. Now he positively was married, he thought he would rather have the daughter than the mother, which is a reverse of the order of human thankfulness at a gift of the Gods.

'Richard, my boy!' he said heartily, 'congratulate me.'

'I should be happy to, if I could,' sedately replied the hero, to the consternation of those around. Nodding to the bridesmaids and bowing to the old lady, he passed out.

Adrian, who had been behind him, deputed to watch

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for a possible unpleasantness, just hinted to John: 'You know, poor fellow, he has got into a mess with his marriage.'

'Oh! ah! yes!' kindly said John, 'poor fellow!'

All the puppets then rolled off to the breakfast.

Adrian hurried after Richard in an extremely discontented state of mind. Not to be at the breakfast and see the best of the fun, disgusted him. However, he remembered that he was a philosopher, and the strong disgust he felt was only expressed in concentrated cynicism on every earthly matter engendered by the conversation. They walked side by side into Kensington Gardens. The hero was mouthing away to himself, talking by fits.

Presently he faced Adrian, crying: 'And I might have stopped it! I see it now! I might have stopped it by going straight to him, and asking him if he dared marry a girl who did not love him. And I never thought of it. Good heaven! I feel this miserable affair on my conscience.'

'Ah!' groaned Adrian. 'An unpleasant cargo for the conscience, that! I would rather carry anything on mine than a married couple. Do you purpose going to him now?'

The hero soliloquized: 'He's not a bad sort of man. . . .'

'Well, he's not a Cavalier,' said Adrian, 'and that's why you wonder your aunt selected him, no doubt? He's decidedly of the Roundhead type, with the Puritan extracted, or inoffensive, if latent.'

'There's the double infamy!' cried Richard, 'that a man you can't call bad, should do this damned thing!'

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'Well, it's hard we can't find a villain.'

'He would have listened to me, I'm sure.'

'Go to him now, Richard, my son. Go to him now. It's not yet too late. Who knows? If he really has a noble elevated superior mind—though not a Cavalier in person, he may be one at heart—he might, to please you, and since you put such stress upon it, abstain . . . perhaps with some loss of dignity, but never mind. And the request might be singular, or seem so, but everything has happened before in this world, you know, my dear boy. And what an infinite consolation it is for the eccentric, that reflection!'

The hero was impervious to the wise youth. He stared at him as if he were but a speck in the universe he visioned.

It was provoking that Richard should be Adrian's best subject for cynical pastime, in the extraordinary heterodoxies he started, and his worst in the way he took it; and the wise youth, against his will, had to feel as conscious of the young man's imaginative mental armour, as he was of his muscular physical.

'The same sort of day!' mused Richard, looking up. 'I suppose my father's right. We make our own fates, and nature has nothing to do with it.'

Adrian yawned.

'Some difference in the trees, though,' Richard continued abstractedly.

'Growing bald at the top,' said Adrian.

'Will you believe that my aunt Helen compared the conduct of that wretched slave Clare to Lucy's, who, she had the cruel insolence to say, entangled me into marriage?' the hero broke out loudly and rapidly. 'You know—I told you, Adrian—how I had to threaten

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and insist, and how she pleaded, and implored me to wait.'

'Ah! hum!' mumbled Adrian.

'You remember my telling you?' Richard was earnest to hear her exonerated.

'Pleaded and implored, my dear boy? Oh, no doubt she did. Where's the lass that doesn't.'

'Call my wife by another name, if you please.'

'The generic title can't be cancelled because of your having married one of the body, my son.'

'She did all she could to persuade me to wait!' emphasized Richard.

Adrian shook his head with a deplorable smile.

'Come, come, my good Ricky; not all! not all!'

Richard bellowed: 'What more could she have done?'

'She could have shaved her head, for instance.'

This happy shaft did stick. With a furious exclamation Richard shot in front, Adrian following him; and asking him (merely to have his assumption verified), whether he did not think she might have shaved her head? and, presuming her to have done so, whether, in candour, he did not think he would have waited—at least till she looked less of a rank lunatic?

After a minute or so, the wise youth was but a fly buzzing about Richard's head. Three weeks of separation from Lucy, and an excitement deceased, caused him to have soft yearnings for the dear lovely home-face. He told Adrian it was his intention to go down that night. Adrian immediately became serious. He was at a loss what to invent to detain him, beyond the stale fiction that his father was coming to-morrow. He rendered homage to the genius of woman in these

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straits. 'My aunt,' he thought, 'would have the lie ready; and not only that, but she would take care it did its work.'

At this juncture the voice of a cavalier in the Row hailed them, proving to be the Honourable Peter Brayder, Lord Mountfalcon's parasite. He greeted them very cordially; and Richard, remembering some fun they had in the Island, asked him to dine with them; postponing his return till the next day. Lucy was his. It was even sweet to dally with the delight of seeing her.

The Hon. Peter was one who did honour to the body he belonged to. Though not so tall as a West of London footman, he was as shapely; and he had a power of making his voice insinuating, or arrogant, as it suited the exigencies of his profession. He had not a rap of money in the world; yet he rode a horse, lived high, expended largely. The world said that the Hon. Peter was salaried by his Lordship, and that, in common with that of Parasite, he exercised the ancient companion profession. This the world said, and still smiled at the Hon. Peter; for he was an engaging fellow, and where he went not Lord Mountfalcon would not go.

They had a quiet little hotel dinner, ordered by Adrian, and made a square at the table, Ripton Thompson being the fourth. Richard sent down to his office to fetch him, and the two friends shook hands for the first time since the great deed had been executed. Deep was the Old Dog's delight to hear the praises of his Beauty sounded by such aristocratic lips as the Hon. Peter Brayder's. All through the dinner he was throwing out hints and small queries to get a fuller

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account of her; and when the claret had circulated, he spoke a word or two himself, and heard the Hon. Peter eulogize his taste, and wish him a bride as beautiful; at which Ripton blushed, and said, he had no hope of that, and the Hon. Peter assured him marriage did not break the mould.

After the wine this gentleman took his cigar on the balcony, and found occasion to get some conversation with Adrian alone.

'Our young friend here—made it all right with the governor?' he asked carelessly.

'Oh yes!' said Adrian. But it struck him that Brayder might be of assistance in showing Richard a little of the 'society in every form' required by his chief's prescript. 'That is,' he continued, 'we are not yet permitted an interview with the august author of our being, and I have rather a difficult post. 'Tis mine both to keep him here, and also to find him the opportunity to measure himself with his fellow-man. In other words, his father wants him to see something of life before he enters upon housekeeping. Now I am proud to confess that I'm hardly equal to the task. The demi, or damnedmonde—if it's that he wants him to observe—is one that I have not got the walk to.'

'Ha! ha!' laughed Brayder. 'You do the keeping, I offer to parade the demi. I must say, though, it's a queer notion of the old gentleman.'

'It's the continuation of a philosophic plan,' said Adrian.

Brayder followed the curvings of the whiff of his cigar with his eyes, and ejaculated, 'Infernally philosophic!'

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CHAPTER XXXV Clare's Marriage

'Has Lord Mountfalcon left the island?' Adrian inquired.

'Mount? to tell the truth I don't know where he is. Chasing some light craft, I suppose. That's poor Mount's weakness. It's his ruin, poor fellow! He's so confoundedly in earnest at the game.'

'He ought to know it by this time, if fame speaks true,' remarked Adrian.

'He's a baby about women, and always will be,' said Brayder. 'He's been once or twice wanting to marry them. Now there's a woman—you've heard of Mrs. Mount? All the world knows her.—If that woman hadn't scandalized.'—The young man joined them, and checked the communication. Brayder winked to Adrian, and pitifully indicated the presence of an innocent.

'A married man, you know,' said Adrian.

'Yes, yes!—we won't shock him,' Brayder observed. He appeared to study the young man while they talked.

Next morning Richard was surprised by a visit from his aunt. Mrs. Doria took a seat by his side, and spoke as follows:

'My dear nephew. Now you know I have always loved you, and thought of your welfare as if you had been my own child. More than that, I fear. Well, now, you are thinking of returning to—to that place—are you not? Yes. It is as I thought. Very well now, let me speak to you. You are in a much more dangerous position than you imagine. I don't deny your father's affection for you. It would be absurd to deny it. But you are of an age now to appreciate his character. Whatever you may do he will always

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give you money. That you are sure of; that you know. Very well. But you are one to want more than money: you want his love. Richard, I am convinced you will never be happy, whatever base pleasures you may be led into, if he should withhold his love from you. Now, child, you know you have grievously offended him. I wish not to animadvert on your conduct.—You fancied yourself in love, and so on, and you were rash. The less said of it the better now. But you must now—it is your duty now to do something—to do everything that lies in your power to show him you repent. No interruptions! Listen to me. You must consider him. Austin is not like other men. Austin requires the most delicate management. You must—whether you feel it or no—present an appearance of contrition. I counsel it for the good of all. He is just like a woman, and where his feelings are offended he wants utter subservience. He has you in town, and he does not see you:—now you know that he and I are not in communication: we have likewise our differences:—Well, he has you in town, and he holds aloof:—he is trying you, my dear Richard. No: he is not at Raynham: I do not know where he is. He is trying you, child, and you must be patient. You must convince him that you do not care utterly for your own gratification. If this person—I wish to speak of her with respect, for your sake—well, if she loves you *at all*—if, I say, she loves you *one atom*, she will repeat my solicitations for you to stay and patiently wait here till he consents to see you. I tell you candidly, it's your only chance of ever getting him to receive *her*. That you should know. And now,

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Richard, I may add that there is something else you should know. You should know that it depends entirely upon your conduct now, whether you are to see your father's heart for ever divided from you, and a new family at Raynham. You do not understand? I will explain. Brothers and sisters are excellent things for young people, but a new brood of them can hardly be acceptable to a young man. In fact, they are, and must be, aliens. I only tell you what I have heard on good authority. Don't you understand now? Foolish boy! if you do not humour him, he will marry her. Oh! I am sure of it. I know it. And this you will drive him to. I do not warn you on the score of your prospects, but of your feelings. I should regard such a contingency, Richard, as a final division between you. Think of the scandal! but alas, that is the least of the evils.'

It was Mrs. Doria's object to produce an impression, and avoid an argument. She therefore left him as soon as she had, as she supposed, made her mark on the young man. Richard was very silent during the speech, and save for an exclamation or so, had listened attentively. He pondered on what his aunt said. He loved Lady Blandish, and yet he did not wish to see her Lady Feverel. Mrs. Doria laid painful stress on the scandal, and though he did not give his mind to this, he thought of it. He thought of his mother. Where was she? But most his thoughts recurred to his father, and something akin to jealousy slowly awakened his heart to him. He had given him up, and had not latterly felt extremely filial; but he could not bear the idea of a division in the love of which he had ever been the idol and sole object. And such

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a man, too! so good! so generous! If it was jealousy that roused the young man's heart to his father, the better part of love was also revived in it. He thought of old days: of his father's forbearance, his own wilfulness. He looked on himself, and what he had done, with the eyes of such a man. He determined to do all he could to regain his favour.

Mrs. Doria learnt from Adrian in the evening that her nephew intended waiting in town another week.

'That will do,' smiled Mrs. Doria. 'He will be more patient at the end of a week.'

'Oh! does patience beget patience?' said Adrian. 'I was not aware it was a propagating virtue. I surrender him to you. I sha'n't be able to hold him in after one week more. I assure you, my dear aunt, he's already . . .'

'Thank you, no explanation,' Mrs. Doria begged.

When Richard saw her next, he was informed that she had received a most satisfactory letter from Mrs. John Todhunter: quite a glowing account of John's behaviour: but on Richard's desiring to know the words Clare had written, Mrs. Doria objected to be explicit, and shot into wordly gossip.

'Clare seldom glows,' said Richard.

'No, I mean *for her*,' his aunt remarked. 'Don't look like your father, child.'

'I should like to have seen the letter,' said Richard.

Mrs. Doria did not propose to show it.

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CHAPTER XXXVI

A Dinner-Party at Richmond

A Lady driving a pair of greys was noticed by Richard in his rides and walks. She passed him rather obviously and often. She was very handsome; a bold beauty, with shining black hair, red lips, and eyes not afraid of men. The hair was brushed from her temples, leaving one of those fine reckless outlines which the action of driving, and the pace, admirably set off. She took his fancy. He liked the air of petulant gallantry about her, and mused upon the picture, rare to him, of a glorious dashing woman. He thought, too, she looked at him. He was not at the time inclined to be vain, or he might have been sure she did. Once it struck him she nodded slightly.

He asked Adrian one day in the park—who she was.

'I don't know her,' said Adrian. 'Probably a superior priestess of Paphos.'

'Now that 's my idea of Bellona,' Richard exclaimed. 'Not the fury they paint, but a spirited, dauntless, eager-looking creature like that.'

'Bellona?' returned the wise youth. 'I don't think her hair was black. Red, wasn't it! I shouldn't compare her to Bellona; though, no doubt, she 's as ready to spill blood. Look at her! She does seem to scent carnage. I see your idea. No; I should liken her to Diana emerged from the tutorship of Master Endymion, and at nice play among the gods. Depend upon it—they tell us nothing of the matter—Olympus shrouds

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the story—but you may be certain that when she left the pretty shepherd she had greater vogue than Venus up aloft.'

Brayder joined them.

'See Mrs. Mount go by?' he said.

'Oh, that's Mrs. Mount!' cried Adrian.

'Who's Mrs. Mount?' Richard inquired.

'A sister to Miss Random, my dear boy.'

'Like to know her?' drawled the Hon. Peter.

Richard replied indifferently, 'No,' and Mrs. Mount passed out of sight and out of conversation.

The young man wrote submissive letters to his father. 'I have remained here waiting to see you now five weeks,' he wrote. 'I have written to you three letters, and you do not reply to them. Let me tell you again how sincerely I desire and pray that you will come, or permit me to come to you and throw myself at your feet, and beg my forgiveness, and hers. She as earnestly implores it. Indeed, I am very wretched, sir. Believe me, there is nothing I would not do to regain your esteem and the love I fear I have unhappily forfeited. I will remain another week in the hope of hearing from you, or seeing you. I beg of you, sir, not to drive me mad. Whatever you ask of me I will consent to.'

'Nothing he would not do!' the baronet commented as he read. 'There is nothing he would not do! He will remain another week and give me that final chance! And it is I who drive him mad! Already he is beginning to cast his retribution on my shoulders.'

Sir Austin had really gone down to Wales to be out of the way. A Shaddock-Dogmatist does not meet misfortune without hearing of it, and the author of

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'The Pilgrim's Scrip' in trouble found London too hot for him. He quitted London to take refuge among the mountains; living there in solitary commune with a virgin Note-book.

Some indefinite scheme was in his head in this treatment of his son. Had he construed it, it would have looked ugly; and it settled to a vague principle that the young man should be tried and tested.

'Let him learn to deny himself something. Let him live with his equals for a term. If he loves me he will read my wishes.' Thus he explained his principle to Lady Blandish.

The lady wrote: 'You speak of a term. Till when? May I name one to him? It is the dreadful *uncertainty* that reduces him to despair. That, and nothing else. Pray be explicit.'

In return, he distantly indicated Richard's majority.

How could Lady Blandish go and ask the young man to wait a year away from his wife? Her instinct began to open a wide eye on the idol she worshipped.

When people do not themselves know what they mean, they succeed in deceiving and imposing upon others. Not only was Lady Blandish mystified; Mrs. Doria, who pierced into the recesses of everybody's mind, and had always been in the habit of reading off her brother from infancy, and had never known herself to be once wrong about him, she confessed she was quite at a loss to comprehend Austin's principle. 'For principle he has,' said Mrs. Doria; 'he never acts without one. But what it is, I cannot at present perceive. If he would write, and command the boy to await his return, all would be clear. He allows us to go and fetch him, and then leaves us all in a quandary. It

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must be some woman's influence. That is the only way to account for it.'

'Singular!' interjected Adrian, 'what pride women have in their sex! Well, I have to tell you, my dear aunt, that the day after to-morrow I hand my charge over to your keeping. I can't hold him in an hour longer. I've had to leash him with lies till my invention's exhausted. I petition to have them put down to the chief's account, but when the stream runs dry I can do no more. The last was, that I had heard from him desiring me to have the South-west bedroom ready for him on Tuesday proximate. "So!" says my son, "I'll wait till then," and from the gigantic effort he exhibited in coming to it, I doubt any human power's getting him to wait longer.'

'We must, we must detain him,' said Mrs. Doria. 'If we do not, I am convinced Austin will do something rash that he will for ever repent. He will marry that woman, Adrian. Mark my words. Now with any other young man . . . But Richard's education! that ridiculous System! . . . Has he no distraction? nothing to amuse him?'

'Poor boy! I suppose he wants his own particular play-fellow.'

The wise youth had to bow to a reproof.

'I tell you, Adrian, he will marry that woman.'

'My dear aunt! Can a chaste man do aught more commendable?'

'Has the boy no object we can induce him to follow? —If he had but a profession!'

'What say you to the regeneration of the streets of London, and the profession of moral-scavenger, aunt? I assure you I have served a month's apprenticeship

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with him. We sally forth on the tenth hour of the night. A female passes. I hear him groan. "Is *she* one of them, Adrian?" I am compelled to admit she is not the saint he deems it the portion of every creature wearing petticoats to be. Another groan; an evident internal, "It cannot be—and yet!" . . . that we hear on the stage. Rollings of eyes: impious questionings of the Creator of the universe; savage mutterings against brutal males; and then we meet a second young person, and repeat the performance—of which I am rather tired. It would be all very well, but he turns upon me, and lectures me because I don't hire a house, and furnish it for all the women one meets to live in in purity. Now that's too much to ask of a quiet man. Master Thompson has latterly relieved me, I'm happy to say.'

Mrs. Doria thought her thoughts.

'Has Austin written to you since you were in town?'

'Not an Aphorism!' returned Adrian.

'I must see Richard to-morrow morning,' Mrs. Doria ended the colloquy by saying.

The result of her interview with her nephew was, that Richard made no allusion to a departure on the Tuesday; and for many days afterward he appeared to have an absorbing business on his hands: but what it was Adrian did not then learn, and his admiration of Mrs. Doria's genius for management rose to a very high pitch.

On a morning in October they had an early visitor in the person of the Hon. Peter, whom they had not seen for a week or more.

'Gentlemen,' he said, flourishing his cane in his most

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affable manner, 'I've come to propose to you to join us in a little dinner-party at Richmond. Nobody's in town, you know. London's as dead as a stock-fish. Nothing but the scrapings to offer you. But the weather's fine: I flatter myself you'll find the company agreeable. What says my friend Feverel?'

Richard begged to be excused.

'No, no: positively you must come,' said the Hon. Peter. 'I've had some trouble to get them together to relieve the dulness of your incarceration. Richmond's within the rules of your prison. You can be back by night. Moonlight on the water—lovely woman. We've engaged a city-barge to pull us back. Eight oars—I'm not sure it isn't sixteen. Come—the word!'

Adrian was for going. Richard said he had an appointment with Ripton.

'You're in for another rick, you two,' said Adrian. 'Arrange that we go. You haven't seen the cockney's Paradise. Abjure Blazes, and taste of peace, my son.'

After some persuasion, Richard yawned wearily, and got up, and threw aside the care that was on him, saying, 'Very well. Just as you like. We'll take old Rip with us.'

Adrian consulted Brayder's eye at this. The Hon. Peter briskly declared he should be delighted to have Feverel's friend, and offered to take them all down in his drag.

'If you don't get a match on to swim there with the tide—eh, Feverel, my boy?'

Richard replied that he had given up that sort of thing, at which Brayder communicated a queer glance to Adrian, and applauded the youth.

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CHAPTER XXXVI
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Richmond was under a still October sun. The pleasant landscape, bathed in Autumn, stretched from the foot of the hill to a red horizon haze. The day was like none that Richard vividly remembered. It touched no link in the chain of his recollection. It was quiet, and belonged to the spirit of the season.

Adrian had divined the character of the scrapings they were to meet. Brayder introduced them to one or two of the men, hastily and in rather an undervoice, as a thing to get over. They made their bow to the first knot of ladies they encountered. Propriety was observed strictly, even to severity. The general talk was of the weather. Here and there a lady would seize a button-hole or any little bit of the habiliments, of the man she was addressing; and if it came to her to chide him, she did it with more than a forefinger. This, however, was only here and there, and a privilege of intimacy.

Where ladies are gathered together, the Queen of the assemblage may be known by her Court of males. The Queen of the present gathering leaned against a corner of the open window, surrounded by a stalwart Court, in whom a practised eye would have discerned guardsmen, and Ripton, with a sinking of the heart, apprehended lords. They were fine men, offering inanimate homage. The trim of their whiskerage, the cut of their coats, the high-bred indolence in their aspect, eclipsed Ripton's sense of self-esteem. But they kindly looked over him. Occasionally one committed a momentary outrage on him with an eye-glass, seeming to cry out in a voice of scathing scorn, 'Who's this?' and Ripton got closer to his hero to justify his humble pretensions to existence and an

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identity in the shadow of him. Richard gazed about. Heroes do not always know what to say or do; and the cold bath before dinner in strange company is one of the instances. He had recognized his superb Bellona in the lady by the garden window. For Brayder the men had nods and jokes, the ladies a pretty playfulness. He was very busy, passing between the groups, chatting, laughing, taking the feminine taps he received, and sometimes returning them in sly whispers. Adrian sat down and crossed his legs, looking amused and benignant.

'Whose dinner is it?' Ripton heard a mignonne beauty ask a cavalier.

'Mount's, I suppose,' was the answer.

'Where is he? Why don't he come?'

'An affaire, I fancy.'

'There he is again! How shamefully he treats Mrs. Mount!'

'She don't seem to cry over it.'

Mrs. Mount was flashing her teeth and eyes with laughter at one of her Court, who appeared to be Fool.

Dinner was announced. The ladies proclaimed extravagant appetites. Brayder posted his three friends. Ripton found himself under the lee of a dame with a bosom. On the other side of him was the mignonne. Adrian was at the lower end of the table. Ladies were in profusion, and he had his share. Brayder drew Richard from seat to seat. A happy man had established himself next to Mrs. Mount. Him Brayder hailed to take the head of the table. The happy man objected, Brayder continued urgent, the lady tenderly insisted, the happy man grimaced, dropped into the post of honour, strove to look placable. Richard

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usurped his chair, and was not badly welcomed by his neighbour.

Then the dinner commenced, and had all the attention of the company, till the flying of the first champagne-cork gave the signal, and a hum began to spread. Sparkling wine, that looseneth the tongue, and displayeth the verity, hath also the quality of colouring it. The ladies laughed high; Richard only thought them gay and natural. They flung back in their chairs and laughed to tears; Ripton thought only of the pleasure he had in their society. The champagne-corks continued a regular file-firing.

'Where have you been lately? I haven't seen you in the park,' said Mrs. Mount to Richard.

'No,' he replied, 'I've not been there.' The question seemed odd: she spoke so simply that it did not impress him. He emptied his glass, and had it filled again.

The Hon. Peter did most of the open talking, which related to horses, yachting, opera, and sport generally: who was ruined; by what horse, or by what woman. He told one or two of Richard's feats. Fair smiles rewarded the hero.

'Do you bet?' said Mrs. Mount.

'Only on myself,' returned Richard.

'Bravo!' cried his Bellona, and her eye sent a lingering delirious sparkle across her brimming glass at him.

'I'm sure you're a safe one to back,' she added, and seemed to scan his points approvingly.

Richard's cheeks mounted bloom.

'Don't you adore champagne?' quoth the dame with a bosom to Ripton.

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'Oh, yes!' answered Ripton, with more candour than accuracy, 'I always drink it.'

'Do you indeed?' said the enraptured bosom, ogling him. 'You would be a friend, now! I hope you don't object to a lady joining you now and then. Champagne's my folly.'

A laugh was circling among the ladies of whom Adrian was the centre; first low, and as he continued some narration, peals resounded, till those excluded from the fun demanded the cue, and ladies leaned behind gentlemen to take it up, and formed an electric chain of laughter. Each one, as her ear received it, caught up her handkerchief, and laughed, and looked shocked afterwards, or looked shocked and then spouted laughter. The anecdote might have been communicated to the bewildered cavaliers, but coming to a lady of a demurer cast, she looked shocked without laughing, and reproved the female table, in whose breasts it was consigned to burial: but here and there a man's head was seen bent, and a lady's mouth moved, though her face was not turned toward him, and a man's broad laugh was presently heard, while the lady gazed unconsciously before her, and preserved her gravity if she could escape any other lady's eyes; failing in which, handkerchiefs were simultaneously seized, and a second chime arose, till the tickling force subsided to a few chance bursts.

What nonsense it is that my father writes about women! thought Richard. He says they can't laugh, and don't understand humour. It comes, he reflected, of his shutting himself from the world. And the idea that he was seeing the world, and feeling wiser, flattered him. He talked fluently to his dangerous

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Bellona. He gave her some reminiscences of Adrian's whimsies.

'Oh!' said she, 'that's your tutor, is it!' She eyed the young man as if she thought he must go far and fast.

Ripton felt a push. 'Look at that,' said the bosom, fuming utter disgust. He was directed to see a manly arm round the waist of the mignonne. 'Now, that's what I don't like in company,' the bosom inflated to observe with sufficient emphasis. 'She always will allow it with everybody. Give her a nudge.'

Ripton protested that he dared not; upon which she said, 'Then I will'; and inclined her sumptuous bust across his lap, breathing wine in his face, and gave the nudge. The mignonne turned an inquiring eye on Ripton; a mischievous spark shot from it. She laughed, and said: 'Aren't you satisfied with the old girl?'

'Impudence!' muttered the bosom, growing grander and redder.

'Do, do fill her glass, and keep her quiet — she drinks port when there's no more champagne,' said the mignonne.

The bosom revenged herself by whispering to Ripton scandal of the mignonne, and between them he was enabled to form a correcter estimate of the company, and quite recovered from his original awe; so much so as to feel a touch of jealousy at seeing his lively little neighbour still held in absolute possession.

Mrs. Mount did not come out much; but there was a deferential manner in the bearing of the men toward her, which those haughty creatures accord not save to clever women; and she contrived to hold the talk with

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three or four at the head of the table while she still had passages aside with Richard.

The port and claret went very well after the champagne. The ladies here did not ignominiously surrender the field to the gentlemen; they maintained their position with honour. Silver was seen far out on Thames. The wine ebbed, and the laughter. Sentiment and cigars took up the wondrous tale.

'Oh, what a lovely night!' said the ladies, looking above.

'Charming,' said the gentlemen, looking below.

The faint-smelling cool Autumn air was pleasant after the feast. Fragrant weeds burned bright about the garden.

'We are split into couples,' said Adrian to Richard, who was standing alone, eyeing the landscape. ''Tis the influence of the moon! Apparently we are in Cyprus. How has my son enjoyed himself? How likes he the society of Aspasia? I feel like a wise Greek to-night.'

Adrian was jolly, and rolled comfortably as he talked. Ripton had been carried off by the sentimental bosom. He came up to them and whispered: 'By Jove, Ricky! do you know what sort of women these are?'

Richard said he thought them a nice sort.

'Puritan!' exclaimed Adrian, slapping Ripton on the back. 'Why didn't you get tipsy, sir? Don't you ever intoxicate yourself except at lawful marriages? Reveal to us what you have done with the portly dame?'

Ripton endured his bantering that he might hang about Richard, and watch over him. He was jealous of his innocent Beauty's husband being in proximity with such women. Murmuring couples passed them to and fro.

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CHAPTER XXXVI
A Dinner-Party at Richmond

'By Jove, Ricky!' Ripton favoured his friend with another hard whisper, 'there's a woman smoking!'

'And why not, O Riptonus?' said Adrian. 'Art unaware that woman cosmopolitan is woman consummate? and dost grumble to pay the small price for the splendid gem?'

'Well, I don't like women to smoke,' said plain Ripton.

'Why mayn't they do what men do?' the hero cried impetuously. 'I hate that contemptible narrow-mindedness. It's that makes the ruin and horrors I see. Why mayn't they do what men do? I like the women who are brave enough not to be hypocrites. By heaven! if these women are bad, I like them better than a set of hypocritical creatures who are all show, and deceive you in the end.'

'Bravo!' shouted Adrian. 'There speaks the regenerator.'

Ripton, as usual, was crushed by his leader. He had no argument. He still thought women ought not to smoke; and he thought of one far away, lonely by the sea, who was perfect without being cosmopolitan.

'The Pilgrim's Scrip' remarks that: 'Young men take joy in nothing so much as the thinking women Angels: and nothing sours men of experience more than knowing that all are not quite so.'

The Aphorist would have pardoned Ripton Thompson his first Random extravagance, had he perceived the simple warm-hearted worship of feminine goodness Richard's young bride had inspired in the breast of the youth. It might possibly have taught him to put deeper trust in our nature.

Ripton thought of her, and had a feeling of sadness. He wandered about the grounds by himself, went

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through an open postern, and threw himself down among some bushes on the slope of the hill. Lying there, and meditating, he became aware of voices conversing.

'What does he want?' said a woman's voice. 'It's another of his villainies, I know. Upon my honour, Brayder, when I think of what I have to reproach him for, I think I must go mad, or kill him.'

'Tragic!' said the Hon. Peter. 'Haven't you revenged yourself, Bella, pretty often? Best deal openly. This is a commercial transaction. You ask for money, and you are to have it—on the conditions: double the sum, and debts paid.'

'He applies to me!'

'You know, my dear Bella, it has long been all up between you. I think Mount has behaved very well, considering all he knows. He's not easily hoodwinked, you know. He resigns himself to his fate, and follows other game.'

'Then the condition is, that I am to seduce this young man?'

'My dear Bella! you strike your bird like a hawk. I didn't say seduce. Hold him in—play with him. Amuse him.'

'I don't understand half-measures.'

'Women seldom do.'

'How I hate you, Brayder!'

'I thank your ladyship.'

The two walked farther. Ripton had heard some little of the colloquy. He left the spot in a serious mood, apprehensive of something dark to the people he loved, though he had no idea of what the Hon. Peter's stipulation involved.

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On the voyage back to town, Richard was again selected to sit by Mrs. Mount. Brayder and Adrian started the jokes. The pair of parasites got on extremely well together. Soft fell the plash of the oars; softly the moonlight curled around them; softly the banks glided by. The ladies were in a state of high sentiment. They sang without request. All deemed the British ballad-monger an appropriate interpreter of their emotions. After good wine, and plenty thereof, fair throats will make men of taste swallow that remarkable composer. Eyes, lips, hearts; darts and smarts and sighs; beauty, duty; bosom, blossom; false one, farewell! To this pathetic strain they melted. Mrs. Mount, though strongly requested, declined to sing. She preserved her state. Under the tall aspens of Brentford-ait, and on they swept, the white moon in their wake. Richard's hand lay open by his side. Mrs. Mount's little white hand by misadventure fell into it. It was not pressed, or soothed for its fall, or made intimate with eloquent fingers. It lay there like a bit of snow on the cold ground. A yellow leaf wavering down from the aspens struck Richard's cheek, and he drew away the very hand to throw back his hair and smooth his face, and then folded his arms, unconscious of offence. He was thinking ambitiously of his life: his blood was untroubled, his brain calmly working.

'Which is the more perilous?' is a problem put by the 'Pilgrim': 'To meet the temptings of Eve, or to pique her?'

Mrs. Mount stared at the young man as at a curiosity, and turned to flirt with one of her Court. The Guardsmen were mostly sentimental. One or two rattled,

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and one was such a good-humoured fellow that Adrian could not make him ridiculous. The others seemed to give themselves up to a silent waxing in length of limb. However far they sat removed, everybody was entangled in their legs. Pursuing his studies, Adrian came to the conclusion, that the same close intellectual and moral affinity which he had discovered to exist between our nobility and our yeomanry, is to be observed between the Guardsman class, and that of the corps de ballet: they both live by the strength of their legs, where also their wits, if they do not altogether reside there, are principally developed: both are volage; wine, tobacco, and the moon, influence both alike; and admitting the one marked difference that does exist, it is, after all, pretty nearly the same thing to be coquetting and sinning on two legs as on the point of a toe.

A long Guardsman with a deep bass voice sang a doleful song about the twining tendrils of the heart ruthlessly torn, but required urgent persuasions and heavy trumpeting of his lungs to get to the end: before he had accomplished it, Adrian had contrived to raise a laugh in his neighbourhood, so that the company was divided, and the camp split: jollity returned to one-half, while sentiment held the other. Ripton, blotted behind the bosom, was only lucky in securing a higher degree of heat than was possible for the rest. 'Are you cold?' she would ask, smiling charitably.

'*I* am,' said the mignonne, as if to excuse her conduct.

'You always appear to be,' the fat one sniffed and snapped.

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'Won't you warm two, Mrs. Mortimer?' said the naughty little woman.

Disdain prevented any further notice of her. Those familiar with the ladies enjoyed their sparring, which was frequent. The mignonne was heard to whisper: 'That poor fellow will certainly be stewed.'

Very prettily the ladies took and gave warmth, for the air on the water was chill and misty. Adrian had beside him the demure one who had stopped the circulation of his anecdote. She in nowise objected to the fair exchange, but said 'Hush!' betweenwhiles.

Past Kew and Hammersmith, on the cool smooth water; across Putney reach; through Battersea bridge; and the City grew around them, and the shadows of great mill-factories slept athwart the moonlight.

All the ladies prattled sweetly of a charming day when they alighted on land. Several cavaliers crushed for the honour of conducting Mrs. Mount to her home.

'My brougham's here; I shall go alone,' said Mrs. Mount. 'Some one arrange my shawl.'

She turned her back to Richard, who had a view of a delicate neck as he manipulated with the bearing of a mailed knight.

'Which way are you going?' she asked carelessly, and, to his reply as to the direction, said: 'Then I can give you a lift,' and she took his arm with a matter-of-course air, and walked up the stairs with him.

Ripton saw what had happened. He was going to follow: the portly dame retained him, and desired him to get her a cab.

'Oh you happy fellow!' said the bright-eyed mignonne, passing by.

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Ripton procured the cab, and stuffed it full without having to get into it himself.

'Try and let him come in too?' said the persecuting creature, again passing.

'Take liberties with your men—you sha'n't with me,' retorted the angry bosom, and drove off.

'So she's been and gone and run away and left him after all his trouble!' cried the pert little thing, peering into Ripton's eyes. 'Now you'll never be so foolish as to pin your faith to fat women again. There! he shall be made happy another time.' She gave his nose a comical tap, and tripped away with her possessor.

Ripton rather forgot his friend for some minutes: Random thoughts laid hold of him. Cabs and carriages rattled past. He was sure he had been among members of the nobility that day, though when they went by him now they only recognized him with an effort of the eyelids. He began to think of the day with exultation, as an event. Recollections of the mignonne were captivating. 'Blue eyes—just what I like! And such a little impudent nose, and red lips, pouting—the very thing I like! And her hair? darkish, I think—say, brown. And so saucy, and light on her feet. And kind she is, or she wouldn't have talked to me like that.' Thus, with a groaning soul, he pictured her. His reason voluntarily consigned her to the aristocracy as a natural appanage: but he did amorously wish that Fortune had made a lord of him.

Then his mind reverted to Mrs. Mount, and the strange bits of the conversation he had heard on the hill. He was not one to suspect anybody positively. He was timid of fixing a suspicion. It hovered

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indefinitely, and clouded people, without stirring him to any resolve. Still the attentions of the lady toward Richard were queer. He endeavoured to imagine they were in the nature of things, because Richard was so handsome that any woman must take to him. 'But he's married,' said Ripton, 'and he mustn't go near these people if he's married.' Not a high morality, perhaps: better than none at all: better for the world were it practised more. He thought of Richard along with that sparkling dame, alone with her. The adorable beauty of his dear bride, her pure heavenly face, swam before him. Thinking of her, he lost sight of the mignonne who had made him giddy.

He walked to Richard's hotel, and up and down the street there, hoping every minute to hear his step: sometimes fancying he might have returned and gone to bed. Two o'clock struck. Ripton could not go away. He was sure he should not sleep if he did. At last the cold sent him homeward, and leaving the street, on the moonlight side of Piccadilly he met his friend patrolling with his head up and that swing of the feet proper to men who are chanting verses.

'Old Rip!' cried Richard cheerily. 'What on earth are you doing here at this hour of the morning?'

Ripton muttered of his pleasure at meeting him. 'I wanted to shake your hand before I went home.'

Richard smiled on him in an amused kindly way. 'That all? You may shake my hand any day, like a true man as you are, old Rip! I've been speaking about you. Do you know, that—Mrs. Mount—never saw you all the time at Richmond, or in the boat!'

'Oh!' Ripton said, well assured that he was a dwarf: 'You saw her safe home?'

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'Yes. I've been there for the last couple of hours—talking. She talks capitally: she's wonderfully clever. She's very like a man, only much nicer. I like her.'

'But, Richard, excuse me—I'm sure I don't mean to offend you—but now you're married . . . perhaps you couldn't help seeing her home, but I think you really indeed oughtn't to have gone upstairs.'

Ripton delivered this opinion with a modest impressiveness.

'What do you mean?' said Richard. 'You don't suppose I care for any woman but my little darling down there.' He laughed.

'No; of course not. That's absurd. What I mean is, that people perhaps will—you know, they do—they say all manner of things, and that makes unhappiness, and . . . I do wish you were going home to-morrow, Ricky. I mean, to your dear wife.' Ripton blushed and looked away as he spoke.

The hero gave one of his scornful glances. 'So you're anxious about my reputation. I hate that way of looking on women. Because they have been once misled—look how much weaker they are!—because the world has given them an ill fame, you would treat them as contagious, and keep away from them for the sake of your character!'

'It would be different with me,' quoth Ripton.

'How?' asked the hero.

'Because I'm worse than you,' was all the logical explanation Ripton was capable of.

'I do hope you will go home soon,' he added.

'Yes,' said Richard, 'and I, so do I hope so. But I've work to do now. I dare not, I cannot, leave it. Lucy would be the last to ask me;—You saw her letter

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CHAPTER XXXVI
A Dinner-Party at Richmond

yesterday. Now listen to me, Rip. I want to make you be just to women.'

Then he read Ripton a lecture on erring women, speaking of them as if he had known them and studied them for years. Clever, beautiful, but betrayed by love, it was the first duty of all true men to cherish and redeem them. 'We turn them into curses, Rip; these divine creatures.' And the world suffered for it. That—that was the root of all the evil in the world!

'I don't feel anger or horror at these poor women, Rip! It's strange. I knew what they were when we came home in the boat. But I do—it tears my heart to see a young girl given over to an old man—a man she doesn't love. That's shame!—Don't speak of it.'

Forgetting to contest the premiss, that all betrayed women are betrayed by love, Ripton was quite silenced. He, like most young men, had pondered somewhat on this matter, and was inclined to be sentimental when he was not hungry. They walked in the moonlight by the railings of the park. Richard harangued at leisure, while Ripton's teeth chattered. Chivalry might be dead, but still there was something to do, went the strain. The lady of the day had not been thrown in the hero's path without an object, he said; and he was sadly right there. He did not express the thing clearly; nevertheless Ripton understood him to mean he intended to rescue that lady from further transgressions, and show a certain scorn of the world. That lady, and then other ladies unknown, were to be rescued. Ripton was to help. He and Ripton were to be the knights of this enterprise. When appealed to, Ripton acquiesced, and shivered. Not only were they to be knights, they would have to be Titans, for the powers

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of the world, the spurious ruling Social Gods, would have to be defied and overthrown. And Titan number one flung up his handsome bold face as if to challenge base Jove on the spot; and Titan number two strained the upper button of his coat to meet across his pocket-handkerchief on his chest, and warmed his fingers under his coat-tails. The moon had fallen from her high seat and was in the mists of the West, when he was allowed to seek his blankets, and the cold acting on his friend's eloquence made Ripton's flesh very contrite. The poor fellow had thinner blood than the hero; but his heart was good. By the time he had got a little warmth about him, his heart gratefully strove to encourage him in the conception of becoming a knight and a Titan; and so striving Ripton fell asleep and dreamed.

CHAPTER XXXVII

Mrs. Berry on Matrimony

Behold the hero embarked in the redemption of an erring beautiful woman.

'Alas!' writes the 'Pilgrim' at this very time to Lady Blandish, 'I cannot get that legend of the Serpent from me, the more I think. Has he not caught you, and ranked you foremost in his legions? For see: till you were fashioned, the fruits hung immobile on the boughs. They swayed before us, glistening and cold. The hand must be eager that plucked them. They did not come down to us, and smile, and speak our

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language, and read our thoughts, and know when to fly, when to follow! how surely to have us!

'Do but mark one of you standing openly in the track of the Serpent. What shall be done with her? I fear the world is wiser than its judges! Turn from her, says the world. By day the sons of the world do. It darkens, and they dance together downward. Then comes there one of the world's elect who deems old counsel devilish; indifference to the end of evil worse than its pursuit. He comes to reclaim her. From deepest bane will he bring her back to highest blessing. Is not that a bait already? Poor fish! 'tis wondrous flattering. The Serpent has slimed her so to secure him! With slow weary steps he draws her into light: she clings to him; she is human; part of his work, and he loves it. As they mount upward, he looks on her more, while she, it may be, looks above. What has touched him? What has passed out of her, and into him? The Serpent laughs below. At the gateways of the Sun they fall together!'

This alliterative production was written without any sense of the peril that makes prophecy.

It suited Sir Austin to write thus. It was a channel to his acrimony moderated through his philosophy. The letter was a reply to a vehement entreaty from Lady Blandish for him to come up to Richard and forgive him thoroughly: Richard's name was not mentioned in it.

'He tries to be more than he is,' thought the lady: and she began insensibly to conceive him less than he was.

The baronet was conscious of a certain false gratifi-

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cation in his son's apparent obedience to his wishes and complete submission; a gratification he chose to accept as his due, without dissecting or accounting for it. The intelligence reiterating that Richard waited, and still waited; Richard's letters, and more his dumb abiding and practical penitence; vindicated humanity sufficiently to stop the course of virulent aphorisms. He could speak, we have seen, in sorrow for this frail nature of ours, that he had once stood forth to champion. 'But how long will this last?' he demanded, with the air of Hippias. He did not reflect how long it had lasted. Indeed, his indigestion of wrath had made of him a moral Dyspepsy.

It was not mere obedience that held Richard from the arms of his young wife: nor was it this new knightly enterprise he had presumed to undertake. Hero, as he was, a youth, open to the insane promptings of hot blood, he was not a fool. There had been talk between him and Mrs. Doria of his mother. Now that he had broken from his father, his heart spoke for her. She lived, he knew: he knew no more. Words painfully hovering along the borders of plain speech had been communicated to him, filling him with moody imaginings. If he thought of her, the red was on his face, though he could not have said why. But now, after canvassing the conduct of his father, and throwing him aside as a terrible riddle, he asked Mrs. Doria to tell him of his other parent. As softly as she could she told the story. To her the shame was past: she could weep for the poor lady. Richard dropped no tears. Disgrace of this kind is always present to a son, and, educated as he had been, these tidings were a vivid fire in his brain. He resolved to hunt

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her out, and take her from the man. Here was work set to his hand. All her dear husband did was right to Lucy. She encouraged him to stay for that purpose, thinking it also served another. There was Tom Bakewell to watch over Lucy: there was work for him to do. Whether it would please his father he did not stop to consider. As to the justice of the act, let us say nothing.

On Ripton devolved the humbler task of grubbing for Sandoe's place of residence; and as he was unacquainted with the name by which the poet now went in private, his endeavours were not immediately successful. The friends met in the evening at Lady Blandish's town-house, or at the Foreys', where Mrs. Doria procured the reverer of the Royal Martyr, and staunch conservative, a favourable reception. Pity, deep pity for Richard's conduct Ripton saw breathing out of Mrs. Doria. Algernon Feverel treated his nephew with a sort of rough commiseration, as a young fellow who had run off the road.

Pity was in Lady Blandish's eyes, though for a different cause. She doubted if she did well in seconding his father's unwise scheme—supposing him to have a scheme. She saw the young husband encompassed by dangers at a critical time. Not a word of Mrs. Mount had been breathed to her, but the lady had some knowledge of life. She touched on delicate verges to the baronet in her letters, and he understood her well enough. 'If he loves this person to whom he has bound himself, what fear for him? Or are you coming to think it something that bears the name of love because we have to veil the rightful appellation?' So he responded, remote among the mountains. She

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tried very hard to speak plainly. Finally he came to say that he denied himself the pleasure of seeing his son specially, that he for a time might be put to the test the lady seemed to dread. This was almost too much for Lady Blandish. Love's charity boy so loftily serene now that she saw him half denuded—a thing of shanks and wrists—was a trial for her true heart.

Going home at night Richard would laugh at the faces made about his marriage. 'We 'll carry the day, Rip, my Lucy and I! or I 'll do it alone—what there is to do.' He slightly adverted to a natural want of courage in women, which Ripton took to indicate that his Beauty was deficient in that quality. Up leapt the Old Dog: 'I'm sure there never was a braver creature upon earth, Richard! She 's as brave as she 's lovely, I 'll swear she is! Look how she behaved that day! How her voice sounded! She was trembling. . . . Brave? She 'd follow you into battle, Richard!'

And Richard rejoined: 'Talk on, dear old Rip! She 's my darling love, whatever she is! And she is gloriously lovely. No eyes are like hers. I 'll go down to-morrow morning the first thing.'

Ripton only wondered the husband of such a treasure could remain apart from it. So thought Richard for a space.

'But if I go, Rip,' he said despondently, 'if I go for a day even I shall have undone all my work with my father. She says it herself—you saw it in her last letter.'

'Yes,' Ripton assented, and the words 'Please remember me to dear Mr. Thompson,' fluttered about the Old Dog's heart.

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CHAPTER XXXVII
Mrs. Berry on Matrimony

It came to pass that Mrs. Berry, having certain business that led her through Kensington Gardens, spied a figure that she had once dandled in long clothes, and helped make a man of, if ever woman did. He was walking under the trees beside a lady, talking to her, not indifferently. The gentleman was her bridegroom and her babe. 'I know his back,' said Mrs. Berry, as if she had branded a mark on it in infancy. But the lady was not her bride. Mrs. Berry diverged from the path, and got before them on the left flank; she stared, retreated, and came round upon the right. There was that in the lady's face which Mrs. Berry did not like. Her innermost question was, why he was not walking with his own wife? She stopped in front of them. They broke, and passed about her. The lady made a laughing remark to him, whereat he turned to look, and Mrs. Berry bobbed. She had to bob a second time, and then he remembered the worthy creature, and hailed her Penelope, shaking her hand so that he put her in countenance again. Mrs. Berry was extremely agitated. He dismissed her, promising to call upon her in the evening. She heard the lady slip out something from a side of her lip, and they both laughed as she toddled off to a sheltering tree to wipe a corner of each eye. 'I don't like the looks of that woman,' she said, and repeated it resolutely.

'Why doesn't he walk arm-in-arm with her?' was her next inquiry. 'Where's his wife?' succeeded it. After many interrogations of the sort, she arrived at naming the lady a bold-faced thing; adding subsequently, brazen. The lady had apparently shown Mrs. Berry that she wished to get rid of her, and had checked the outpouring of her emotions on the breast

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of her babe. 'I know a lady when I see one,' said Mrs. Berry. 'I haven't lived with 'em for nothing; and if she's a lady bred and born, I wasn't married in the church alive.'

Then, if not a lady, what was she? Mrs. Berry desired to know. 'She's imitation lady, I'm sure she is!' Berry vowed. 'I say she don't look proper.'

Establishing the lady to be a spurious article, however, what was one to think of a married man in company with such? 'Oh no! it ain't that!' Mrs. Berry returned immediately on the charitable tack. 'Belike it's some one of his acquaintance've married her for her looks, and he've just met her. . . . Why it'd be as bad as my Berry!' the relinquished spouse of Berry ejaculated, in horror at the idea of a second man being so monstrous in wickedness. 'Just coupled, too!' Mrs. Berry groaned on the suspicious side of the debate. 'And such a sweet young thing for his wife! But no, I'll never believe it. Not if he tell me so himself! And men don't do that,' she whimpered.

Women are swift at coming to conclusions in these matters; soft women exceedingly swift: and soft women who have been betrayed are rapid beyond measure. Mrs. Berry had not cogitated long ere she pronounced distinctly and without a shadow of dubiosity: 'My opinion is—married or not married, and wheresomever he pick her up—she's nothin' more nor less than a Bella Donna!' as which poisonous plant she forthwith registered the lady in the botanical note-book of her brain. It would have astonished Mrs. Mount to have heard her person so accurately hit off at a glance.

In the evening Richard made good his promise,

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Mrs. Berry on Matrimony

accompanied by Ripton. Mrs. Berry opened the door to them. She could not wait to get him into the parlour. 'You're my own blessed babe; and I'm as good as your mother,—though I didn't suck ye, bein' a maid!' she cried, falling into his arms, while Richard did his best to support the unexpected burden. Then reproaching him tenderly for his guile—at mention of which Ripton chuckled, deeming it his own most honourable portion of the plot—Mrs. Berry led them into the parlour, and revealed to Richard who she was, and how she had tossed him, and hugged him, and kissed him all over, when he was only that big—showing him her stumpy fat arm. 'I kissed ye from head to tail, I did,' said Mrs. Berry, 'and you needn't be ashamed of it. It's be hoped you'll never have nothin' worse come t'ye, my dear!'

Richard assured her he was not a bit ashamed, but warned her that she must not do it now, Mrs. Berry admitting it was out of the question now, and now that he had a wife, moreover. The young men laughed, and Ripton laughing over-loudly drew on himself Mrs. Berry's attention: 'But that Mr. Thompson there—however he can look me in the face after his inn'cence! helping blindfold an old woman!—though I ain't sorry for what I did—that I'm free for to say, and it's over, and blessed be all! Amen! So now where is she and how is she, Mr. Richard, my dear—it's only cuttin' off the "s" and you are as you was.—Why didn't ye bring her with ye to see her old Berry?'

Richard hurriedly explained that Lucy was still in the Isle of Wight.

'Oh! and you've left her for a day or two?' said Mrs. Berry.

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'Good God! I wish it had been a day or two,' cried Richard.

'Ah! and how long have it been?' asked Mrs. Berry, her heart beginning to beat at his manner of speaking.

'Don't talk about it,' said Richard.

'Oh! you never been dudgeonin' already? Oh! you haven't been peckin' at one another yet?' Mrs. Berry exclaimed.

Ripton interposed to tell her such fears were unfounded.

'Then how long ha' you been divided?'

In a guilty voice Ripton stammered 'since September.'

'September!' breathed Mrs. Berry, counting on her fingers, 'September, October, Nov—two months and more! nigh three! A young married husband away from the wife of his bosom nigh three months! Oh my! Oh my! what do that mean?'

'My father sent for me—I'm waiting to see him,' said Richard. A few more words helped Mrs. Berry to comprehend the condition of affairs. Then Mrs. Berry spread her lap, flattened out her hands, fixed her eyes, and spoke.

'My dear young gentleman!—I'd like to call ye my darlin' babe! I'm going to speak as a mother to ye, whether ye likes it or no; and what old Berry says, you won't mind, for she's had ye when there was no conventionals about ye, and she has the feelin's of a mother to you, though humble her state. If there's one that know matrimony it's me, my dear, though Berry did give me no more but nine months of it: and I've known the worst of matrimony, which, if you wants to be woful wise, there it is for ye. For what have been my gain? That man gave me nothin' but

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CHAPTER XXXVII
Mrs. Berry on Matrimony

his name; and Bessy Andrews was as good as Bessy Berry, though both is "Bs," and says he, you was "A," and now you 's "B," so you 're my A B, he says, write yourself down that, he says, the bad man, with his jokes!—Berry went to service.' Mrs. Berry's softness came upon her. 'So I tell ye, Berry went to service. He left the wife of his bosom forlorn and he went to service; because he were al'ays an ambitious man, and wasn't, so to speak, happy out of his uniform—which was his livery—not even in my arms: and he let me know it. He got among them kitchen sluts, which was my mournin' ready made, and worse than a widow's cap to me, which is no shame to wear, and some say becoming. There 's no man as ever lived know better than my Berry how to show his legs to advantage, and gals look at 'em. I don't wonder now that Berry was prostrated. His temptations was strong, and his flesh was weak. Then what I say is, that for a young married man—be he whomsoever he may be—to be separated from the wife of his bosom—a young sweet thing, and he an innocent young gentleman!—so to sunder, in their state, and be kep' from each other, I say it 's as bad as bad can be! For what is matrimony, my dears? We 're told it 's a holy Ordnance. And why are ye so comfortable in matrimony? For that ye are not a sinnin'! And they that severs ye they tempts ye to stray: and you learn too late the meanin' o' them blessin's of the priest—as it was ordained. Separate—what comes? Fust it 's like the circulation of your blood a-stoppin'—all goes wrong. Then there 's misunderstandings—ye 've both lost the key. Then, behold ye, there 's birds o' prey hoverin' over each on ye, and it 's which 'll be snapped up fust.

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Then—Oh, dear! Oh, dear! it be like the devil come into the world again.' Mrs. Berry struck her hands and moaned. 'A day I'll give ye: I'll go so far as a week: but there's the outside. Three months dwellin' apart! That's not matrimony, it's divorcin'! what can it be to her but widowhood? widowhood with no cap to show for it! And what can it be to you, my dear? Think! you been a bachelor three months! and a bachelor man,' Mrs. Berry shook her head most dolefully, 'he ain't a widow woman. I don't go to compare you to Berry, my dear young gentleman. Some men's hearts is vagabonds born—they must go astray—it's there natur' to. But all men are men, and I know the foundation of 'em, by reason of my woe.'

Mrs. Berry paused. Richard was humorously respectful to the sermon. The truth in the good creature's address was not to be disputed or despised, nothwithstanding the inclination to laugh provoked by her quaint way of putting it. Ripton nodded encouragingly at every sentence, for he saw her drift, and wished to second it.

Seeking for an illustration of her meaning, Mrs. Berry solemnly continued: 'We all know what checked prespiration is.' But neither of the young gentlemen could resist this. Out they burst in a roar of laughter.

'Laugh away,' said Mrs. Berry. 'I don't mind ye. I say again, we all do know what checked prespiration is. It fly to the lungs, it gives ye mortal inflammation, and it carries ye off. Then I say checked matrimony is as bad. It fly to the heart, and it carries off the virtue that's in ye, and you might as well be dead! Them that is joined it's their salvation not to separate!

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CHAPTER XXXVII
Mrs. Berry on Matrimony

It don't so much matter before it. That Mr. Thompson there—if he go astray, it ain't from the blessed fold. He hurt himself alone—not double, and belike treble, for who can say now what may be? There's time for it. I'm for holding back young people so that they knows their minds, howsomever they rattles about their hearts. I ain't a speeder of matrimony, and good's my reason! but where it's been done—where they're lawfully joined, and their bodies made one, I do say this, that to put division between 'em then, it's to make wanderin' comets of 'em—creatures without a objeck, and no soul can say what they's good for but to rush about!'

Mrs. Berry here took a heavy breath, as one who has said her utmost for the time being.

'My dear old girl,' Richard went up to her and applauding her on the shoulder, 'you're a very wise old woman. But you mustn't speak to me as if I wanted to stop here. I'm compelled to. I do it for her good chiefly.'

'It's your father that's doin' it, my dear?'

'Well, I'm waiting his pleasure.'

'A pretty pleasure! puttin' a snake in the nest of young turtle-doves! And why don't she come up to you?'

'Well, that you must ask her. The fact is, she's a little timid girl—she wants me to see him first, and when I've made all right, then she'll come.'

'A little timid girl!' cried Mrs. Berry. 'Oh, lor', how she must ha' deceived ye to make ye think that! Look at that ring,' she held out her finger, 'he's a stranger: he's not my lawful! You know what ye did to me, my dear. Could I get my own wedding-ring

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back from her? "No!" says she, firm as a rock, "he said, *with this ring* I thee wed"—I think I see her now, with her pretty eyes and lovesome locks—a darlin'! —And that ring she'd keep to, come life, come death. And she must ha' been a rock for me to give in to her in that. For what's the consequence? Here am I,' Mrs. Berry smoothed down the back of her hand mournfully, 'here am I in a strange ring, that's like a strange man holdin' of me, and me a wearin' of it just to seem decent, and feelin' all over no better than a b—— a big—that nasty name I can't abide!—I tell you, my dear, she ain't soft, no!—except to the man of her heart; and the best of women 's too soft there—more 's our sorrow!'

'Well, well!' said Richard, who thought he knew.

'I agree with you, Mrs. Berry,' Ripton struck in, 'Mrs. Richard would do anything in the world her husband asked her, I'm quite sure.'

'Bless you for your good opinion, Mr. Thompson! Why, see her! she ain't frail on her feet; she looks ye straight in the eyes; she ain't one of your hang-down misses. Look how she behaved at the ceremony!'

'Ah!' sighed Ripton.

'And if you'd ha' seen her when she spoke to me about my ring! Depend upon it, my dear Mr. Richard, if she blinded you about the nerve she've got, it was somethin' she thought she ought to do for your sake, and I wish I'd been by to counsel her, poor blessed babe!—And how much longer, now, can ye stay divided from that darlin'?'

Richard paced up and down.

'A father's will,' urged Mrs. Berry, 'that's a son's

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law; but he mustn't go again' the laws of his nature to do it.'

'Just be quiet at present—talk of other things, there's a good woman,' said Richard.

Mrs. Berry meekly folded her arms.

'How strange, now, our meetin' like this! meetin' at all, too!' she remarked contemplatively. 'It's them advertisements! They brings people together from the ends of the earth, for good or for bad. I often say, there's more lucky accidents, or unlucky ones, since advertisements was the rule, than ever there was before. They make a number of romances, depend upon it! Do you walk much in the Gardens, my dear?'

'Now and then,' said Richard.

'Very pleasant it is there with the fine folks and flowers and titled people,' continued Mrs. Berry. 'That was a handsome woman you was a-walkin' beside, this mornin'.'

'Very,' said Richard.

'She was a handsome woman! or I should say, is, for her day ain't past, and she know it. I thought at first—by her back—it might ha' been your aunt, Mrs. Forey; for she do step out well and hold up her shoulders: straight as a dart she be! But when I come to see her face—Oh, dear me! says I, this ain't one of the family. They none of 'em got such bold faces—nor no *lady* as I know have. But she's a fine woman—that nobody can gainsay.'

Mrs. Berry talked further of the fine woman. It was a liberty she took to speak in this disrespectful tone of her, and Mrs. Berry was quite aware that she was laying herself open to rebuke. She had her end in view. No rebuke was uttered, and during her talk she

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observed intercourse passing between the eyes of the young men.

'Look here, Penelope,' Richard stopped her at last. 'Will it make you comfortable if I tell you I'll obey the laws of my nature and go down at the end of the week?'

'I'll thank the Lord of heaven if you do!' she exclaimed.

'Very well, then—be happy—I will. Now listen. I want you to keep your rooms for me—those she had. I expect, in a day or two, to bring a lady here——'

'A lady?' faltered Mrs. Berry.

'Yes. A lady.'

'May I make so bold as to ask what lady?'

'You may not. Not now. Of course you will know.'

Mrs. Berry's short neck made the best imitation it could of an offended swan's action. She was very angry. She said she did not like so many ladies, which natural objection Richard met by saying that there was only one lady.

'And Mrs. Berry,' he added, dropping his voice. 'You will treat her as you did my dear girl, for she will require not only shelter but kindness. I would rather leave her with you than with any one. She has been very unfortunate.'

His serious air and habitual tone of command fascinated the softness of Berry, and it was not until he had gone that she spoke out. 'Unfort'nate! He's going to bring me an unfort'nate female! Oh! not from my babe can I bear that! Never will I have her here! I see it. It's that bold-faced woman he's got mixed up in, and she've been and made the young man

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think he'll go for to reform her. It's one o' their arts —that is; and he's too innocent a young man to mean anythin' else. But I ain't a house of Magdalens—no! and sooner than have her here I'd have the roof fall over me, I would.'

She sat down to eat her supper on the sublime resolve.

In love, Mrs. Berry's charity was all on the side of the law, and this is the case with many of her sisters. The 'Pilgrim' sneers at them for it, and would have us credit that it is their admirable instinct which, at the expense of every virtue save one, preserves the artificial barrier simply to impose upon us. Men, I presume, are hardly fair judges, and should stand aside and mark.

Early next day Mrs. Berry bundled off to Richard's hotel to let him know her determination. She did not find him there. Returning homeward through the Park, she beheld him on horseback riding by the side of the identical lady. The sight of this public exposure shocked her more than the secret walk under the trees. 'You don't look near your reform yet,' Mrs. Berry apostrophized her. 'You don't look to me one that'd come the Fair Penitent till you've left off bein' fair—if then you do, which some of you don't. Laugh away and show yer airs! Spite o' your hat and feather, and your ridin'-habit, you're a Bella Donna.' Setting her down again absolutely for such, whatever it might signify, Mrs. Berry had a virtuous glow.

In the evening she heard the noise of wheels stopping at the door. 'Never!' she rose from her chair to exclaim. 'He ain't rided her out in the mornin' and been and made a Magdalen of her afore dark?'

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A lady veiled was brought into the house by Richard. Mrs. Berry feebly tried to bar his progress in the passage. He pushed past her, and conducted the lady into the parlour without speaking. Mrs. Berry did not follow. She heard him murmur a few sentences within. Then he came out. All her crest stood up, as she whispered vigorously, 'Mr. Richard, if that woman stay here, I go forth. My house ain't a penitentiary for unfort'nate females, sir——'

He frowned at her curiously; but as she was on the point of renewing her indignant protest, he clapped his hand across her mouth, and spoke words in her ear that had awful import to her. She trembled, breathing low: 'My God, forgive me! Lady Feverel is it? Your mother, Mr. Richard?' And her virtue was humbled.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

An Enchantress

One may suppose that a prematurely aged, oily little man; a poet in bad circumstances; a decrepit butterfly chained to a disappointed inkstand, will not put out strenuous energies to retain his ancient paramour when a robust young man comes imperatively to demand his mother of him in her person. The colloquy was short between Diaper Sandoe and Richard. The question was referred to the poor spiritless lady, who, seeing that her son made no question of it, cast herself on his hands. Small loss to her was Diaper; but he was the loss of habit, and that is

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something to a woman who has lived. The blood of her son had been running so long alien from her that the sense of her motherhood smote her now with strangeness, and Richard's stern gentleness seemed like dreadful justice come upon her. Her heart had almost forgotten its maternal functions. She called him Sir, till he bade her remember he was her son. Her voice sounded to him like that of a broken-throated lamb, so painful and weak it was, with the plaintive stop in the utterance. When he kissed her, her skin was cold. Her thin hand fell out of his when his grasp relaxed. 'Can sin hunt one like this?' he asked, bitterly reproaching himself for the shame she had caused him to endure, and a deep compassion filled his breast.

Poetic justice had been dealt to Diaper the poet. He thought of all he had sacrificed for this woman—the comfortable quarters, the friend, the happy flights. He could not but accuse her of unfaithfulness in leaving him in his old age. Habit had legalized his union with her. He wrote as pathetically of the break of habit as men feel at the death of love; and when we are old and have no fair hope tossing golden locks before us, a wound to this our second nature is quite as sad. I know not even if it be not actually sadder.

Day by day Richard visited his mother. Lady Blandish and Ripton alone were in the secret. Adrian let him do as he pleased. He thought proper to tell him that the public recognition he accorded to a particular lady was, in the present state of the world, scarcely prudent.

''Tis a proof to me of your moral rectitude, my son, but the world will not think so. No one character

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is sufficient to cover two—in a Protestant country especially. The divinity that doth hedge a Bishop would have no chance in contact with your Madam Danaë. Drop the woman, my son. Or permit *me* to speak what you would have her hear.'

Richard listened to him with disgust.

'Well, you 've had my doctorial warning,' said Adrian, and plunged back into his book.

When Lady Feverel had revived to take part in the consultations Mrs. Berry perpetually opened on the subject of Richard's matrimonial duty, another chain was cast about him. 'Do not, oh, do not offend your father!' was her one repeated supplication. Sir Austin had grown to be a vindictive phantom in her mind. She never wept but when she said this.

So Mrs. Berry, to whom Richard had once made mention of Lady Blandish as the only friend he had among women, bundled off in her black-satin dress to obtain an interview with her, and an ally. After coming to an understanding on the matter of the visit, and reiterating many of her views concerning young married people, Mrs. Berry said: 'My lady, if I may speak so bold, I 'd say the sin that 's bein' done is the sin o' the lookers on. And when everybody appear frighted by that young gentleman's father, I 'll say—hopin' your pardon—they no cause be frighted at all. For though it 's nigh twenty year since I knew him, and I knew him then just sixteen months—no more—I 'll say his heart 's as soft as a woman's, which I 've cause for to know. And that 's it. That 's where everybody 's deceived by him, and I was. It 's because he keeps his face, and makes ye think you 're dealin' with a man of iron, and all the while there 's a woman

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underneath. And a man that 's like a woman he 's the puzzle o' life! We can see through ourselves, my lady, and we can see through men, but one o' that sort—he 's like somethin' out of nature. Then I say—hopin' be excused—what 's to do is for to treat him *like* a woman, and not for to let him 'ave his own way—which he don't know himself, and is why nobody else do. Let that sweet young couple come together, and be wholesome in spite of him, I say; and then give him time to come round, just like a woman; and round he 'll come, and give 'em his blessin', and we shall know we 've made him comfortable. He 's angry because matrimony have come between him and his son, and he, woman-like, he 's wantin' to treat what is as if it isn't. But matrimony 's a holier than him. It began long long before him, and it 's be hoped will endoor long 's the time after, if the world 's not coming to rack—wishin' him no harm.'

Now Mrs. Berry only put Lady Blandish's thoughts in bad English. The lady took upon herself seriously to advise Richard to send for his wife. He wrote, bidding her come. Lucy, however, had wits, and inexperienced wits are as a little knowledge. In pursuance of her sage plan to make the family feel her worth, and to conquer the members of it one by one, she had got up a correspondence with Adrian, whom it tickled. Adrian constantly assured her all was going well: time would heal the wound if both the offenders had the fortitude to be patient: he fancied he saw signs of the baronet's relenting: they must do nothing to arrest those favourable symptoms. Indeed the wise youth was languidly seeking to produce them. He wrote, and felt, as Lucy's benefactor. So Lucy replied

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to her husband a cheerful rigmarole he could make nothing of, save that she was happy in hope, and still had fears. Then Mrs. Berry trained her fist to indite a letter to her bride. Her bride answered it by saying she trusted to time. 'You poor marter,' Mrs. Berry wrote back, 'I know what your sufferin's be. They is the only kind a wife should never hide from her husband. He thinks all sorts of things if she can abide being away. And you trusting to time, why it's like trusting not to catch cold out of your natural clothes.' There was no shaking Lucy's firmness.

Richard gave it up. He began to think that the life lying behind him was the life of a fool. What had he done in it? He had burnt a rick and got married! He associated the two acts of his existence. Where was the hero he was to have carved out of Tom Bakewell! —a wretch he had taught to lie and chicane: and for what? Great heavens! how ignoble did a flash from the light of his aspirations make his marriage appear! The young man sought amusement. He allowed his aunt to drag him into society, and sick of that he made late evening calls on Mrs. Mount, oblivious of the purpose he had in visiting her at all. Her man-like conversation, which he took for honesty, was a refreshing change on fair lips.

'Call me Bella: I'll call you Dick,' said she. And it came to be Bella and Dick between them. No mention of Bella occurred in Richard's letters to Lucy.

Mrs. Mount spoke quite openly of herself. 'I pretend to be no better than I am,' she said, 'and I know I'm no worse than many a woman who holds her head high.' To back this she told him stories of blooming

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CHAPTER XXXVIII An Enchantress

dames of good repute, and poured a little social sewerage into his ears.

Also she understood him. 'What you want, my dear Dick, is something to do. You went and got married like a—hum!—friends must be respectful. Go into the army. Try the turf. I can put you up to a trick or two—friends should make themselves useful.'

She told him what she liked in him. 'You're the only man I was ever alone with who don't talk to me of love and make me feel sick. I hate men who can't speak to a woman sensibly.—Just wait a minute.' She left him and presently returned with, 'Ah, Dick! old fellow! how are you?'—arrayed like a cavalier, one arm stuck in her side, her hat jauntily cocked, and a pretty oath on her lips to give reality to the costume. 'What do you think of me? Wasn't it a shame to make a woman of me when I was born to be a man?'

'I don't know that,' said Richard, for the contrast in her attire to those shooting eyes and lips, aired her sex bewitchingly.

'What! you think I don't do it well?'

'Charming! but I can't forget . . .'

'Now that is too bad!' she pouted.

Then she proposed that they should go out into the midnight streets arm-in-arm, and out they went and had great fits of laughter at her impertinent manner of using her eye-glass, and outrageous affectation of the supreme dandy.

'They take up men, Dick, for going about in women's clothes, and vice versaw, I suppose. You'll bail me, old fellaa, if I have to make my bow to the beak, won't you? Say it's becas I'm an honest woman and don't

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care to hide the—a—unmentionables when I wear them—as the t' others do,' sprinkled with the dandy's famous invocations.

He began to conceive romance in that sort of fun.

'You're a wopper, my brave Dick! won't let any peeler take me? by Jove!'

And he with many assurances guaranteed to stand by her, while she bent her thin fingers trying the muscle of his arm, and reposed upon it more. There was delicacy in her dandyism. She was a graceful cavalier.

'Sir Julius,' as they named the dandy's attire, was frequently called for on his evening visits to Mrs. Mount. When he beheld Sir Julius he thought of the lady, and 'vice versaw,' as Sir Julius was fond of exclaiming.

Was ever hero in this fashion wooed?

The woman now and then would peep through Sir Julius. Or she would sit, and talk, and altogether forget she was impersonating that worthy fop.

She never uttered an idea or a reflection, but Richard thought her the cleverest woman he had ever met.

All kinds of problematic notions beset him. She was cold as ice, she hated talk about love, and she was branded by the world.

A rumour spread that reached Mrs. Doria's ears. She rushed to Adrian first. The wise youth believed there was nothing in it. She sailed down upon Richard. 'Is this true? that you have been seen going publicly about with an infamous woman, Richard? Tell me! pray, relieve me!'

Richard knew of no person answering to his aunt's description in whose company he could have been seen.

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'Tell me, I say! Don't quibble. Do you know *any* woman of bad character?'

The acquaintance of a lady very much misjudged and ill-used by the world, Richard admitted to.

Urgent grave advice Mrs. Doria tendered her nephew, both from the moral and the worldly point of view, mentally ejaculating all the while: 'That ridiculous System! That disgraceful marriage!' Sir Austin in his mountain solitude was furnished with serious stuff to brood over.

The rumour came to Lady Blandish. She likewise lectured Richard, and with her he condescended to argue. But he found himself obliged to instance something he had quite neglected. 'Instead of her doing me harm, it's I that will do her good.'

Lady Blandish shook her head and held up her finger. 'This person must be very clever to have given you that delusion, dear.'

'She *is* clever. And the world treats her shamefully.'

'She complains of her position to you?'

'Not a word. But I will stand by her. She has no friend but me.'

'My poor boy! has she made you think that?'

'How unjust you all are!' cried Richard.

'How mad and wicked is the man who can let him be tempted so!' thought Lady Blandish.

He would pronounce no promise not to visit her, not to address her publicly. The world that condemned her and cast her out was no better—worse for its miserable hypocrisy. He knew the world now, the young man said.

'My child! the world may be very bad. I am not

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going to defend it. But you have some one else to think of. Have you forgotten you have a wife, Richard?'

'Ay! you all speak of her now. There's my aunt: "Remember you have a wife!" Do you think I love any one but Lucy? poor little thing! Because I am married am I to give up the society of women?'

'Of women!'

'Isn't she a woman?'

'Too much so!' sighed the defender of her sex.

Adrian became more emphatic in his warnings. Richard laughed at him. The wise youth sneered at Mrs. Mount. The hero then favoured him with a warning equal to his own in emphasis, and surpassing it in sincerity.

'We won't quarrel, my dear boy,' said Adrian. 'I'm a man of peace. Besides, we are not fairly proportioned for a combat. Ride your steed to virtue's goal! All I say is, that I think he'll upset you, and it's better to go at a slow pace and in companionship with the children of the sun. You have a very nice little woman for a wife—well, good-bye!'

To have his wife and the world thrown at his face, was unendurable to Richard; he associated them somewhat after the manner of the rick and the marriage. Charming Sir Julius, always gay, always honest, dispersed his black moods.

'Why, you're taller,' Richard made the discovery.

'Of course I am. Don't you remember you said I was such a little thing when I came out of my woman's shell?'

'And how have you done it?'

'Grown to please you.'

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'Now, if you can do that, you can do anything.'

'And so I would do anything.'

'You would?'

'Honour!'

'Then . . .' his project recurred to him. But the incongruity of speaking seriously to Sir Julius struck him dumb.

'Then what?' asked she.

'Then you're a gallant fellow.'

'That all?'

'Isn't it enough?'

'Not quite. You were going to say something. I saw it in your eyes.'

'You saw that I admired you.'

'Yes, but a man mustn't admire a man.'

'I suppose I had an idea you were a woman.'

'What! when I had the heels of my boots raised half an inch,' Sir Julius turned one heel, and volleyed out silver laughter.

'I don't come much above your shoulder even now,' she said, and proceeded to measure her height beside him with arch up-glances.

'You must grow more.'

''Fraid I can't, Dick! Bootmakers can't do it.'

'I'll show you how,' and he lifted Sir Julius lightly, and bore the fair gentleman to the looking-glass, holding him there exactly on a level with his head. 'Will that do?'

'Yes! Oh but I can't stay here.'

'Why can't you?'

'Why can't I?'

Their eyes met. He put her down instantly.

He should have known then—it was thundered at

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a closed door in him, that he played with fire. But the door being closed, he thought himself internally secure.

Sir Julius, charming as he was, lost his vogue. Seeing that, the wily woman resumed her shell. The memory of Sir Julius breathing about her still, doubled the feminine attraction.

'I ought to have been an actress,' she said.

Richard told her he found all natural women had a similar wish.

'Yes! Ah! then! if I had been!' sighed Mrs. Mount, gazing on the pattern of the carpet.

He took her hand and pressed it.

'You are not happy as you are?'

'No.'

'May I speak to you?'

'Yes.'

Her nearest eye, setting a dimple of her cheek in motion, slid to the corner toward her ear, as she sat with her head sideways to him, listening. When he had gone, she said to herself: 'Old hypocrites talk in that way; but I never heard of a young man doing it, and not making love at the same time.'

Their next meeting displayed her quieter: subdued as one who had been set thinking. He lauded her fair looks. 'Don't make me thrice ashamed,' she petitioned.

But it was not only that mood with her. Dauntless defiance, that splendidly befitted her gallant outline and gave a wildness to her bright bold eyes, when she would call out: 'Happy? who dares say I'm not happy? D'you think if the world whips me I'll wince? D'you think I care for what they say or

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do? Let them kill me! they shall never get one cry out of me!' and flashing on the young man as if he were the congregated enemy, add: 'There! now you know me!'—that was a mood that well became her, and helped the work. She ought to have been an actress.

'This must not go on,' said Lady Blandish and Mrs. Doria in unison. A common object brought them together. They confined their talk to it, and did not disagree. Mrs. Doria engaged to go down to the baronet. Both ladies knew it was a dangerous, likely to turn out a disastrous, expedition. They agreed to it because it was something to do, and doing anything is better than doing nothing. 'Do it,' said the wise youth, when they made him a third, 'do it, if you want him to be a hermit for life. You will bring back nothing but his dead body, ladies—a Hellenic, rather than a Roman, triumph. He will listen to you—he will accompany you to the station—he will hand you into the carriage—and when you point to his seat he will bow profoundly, and retire into his congenial mists.'

Adrian spoke their thoughts. They fretted; they relapsed.

'Speak to him, you, Adrian,' said Mrs. Doria. 'Speak to the boy solemnly. It would be almost better he should go back to that little thing he has married.'

'Almost?' Lady Blandish opened her eyes. 'I have been advising it for the last month and more.'

'A choice of evils,' said Mrs. Doria's sour-sweet face and shake of the head.

Each lady saw a point of dissension, and mutually agreed, with heroic effort, to avoid it by shutting their

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mouths. What was more, they preserved the peace in spite of Adrian's artifices.

'Well, I'll talk to him again,' he said. 'I'll try to get the Engine on the conventional line.'

'Command him!' exclaimed Mrs. Doria.

'Gentle means are, I think, the only means with Richard,' said Lady Blandish.

Throwing banter aside, as much as he could, Adrian spoke to Richard. 'You want to reform this woman. Her manner is open—fair and free—the traditional characteristic. We won't stop to canvass how that particular honesty of deportment that wins your approbation has been gained. In her college it is not uncommon. Girls, you know, are not like boys. At a certain age they can't be quite natural. It's a bad sign if they don't blush, and fib, and affect this and that. It wears off when they're women. But a woman who speaks like a man, and has all those excellent virtues you admire—where has she learnt the trick? She tells you. You don't surely approve of the school? Well, what is there in it, then? Reform her, of course. The task is worthy of your energies. But, if you are appointed to do it, don't do it publicly, and don't attempt it just now. May I ask you whether your wife participates in this undertaking.'

Richard walked away from the interrogation. The wise youth, who hated long unrelieved speeches and had healed his conscience, said no more.

Dear tender Lucy! Poor darling! Richard's eyes moistened. Her letters seemed sadder latterly. Yet she never called to him to come, or he would have gone. His heart leapt up to her. He announced to

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Adrian that he should wait no longer for his father. Adrian placidly nodded.

The enchantress observed that her knight had a clouded brow and an absent voice.

'Richard—I can't call you Dick now, I really don't know why'—she said, 'I want to beg a favour of you.'

'Name it. I can still call you Bella, I suppose?'

'If you care to. What I want to say is this: when you meet me out—to cut it short—please not to recognize me.'

'And why?'

'Do you ask to be told *that*?'

'Certainly I do.'

'Then look: I won't compromise you.'

'I see no harm, Bella.'

'No,' she caressed his hand, 'and there is none. I know that. But,' modest eyelids were drooped, 'other people do,' struggling eyes were raised.

'What do we care for other people?'

'Nothing. I don't. Not that!' snapping her finger. 'I care for you, though.' A prolonged look followed the declaration.

'You're foolish, Bella.'

'Not quite so giddy—that's all.'

He did not combat it with his usual impetuosity. Adrian's abrupt inquiry had sunk in his mind, as the wise youth intended it should. He had instinctively refrained from speaking to Lucy of this lady. But what a noble creature the woman was!

So they met in the Park; Mrs. Mount whipped past him; and secresy added a new sense to their intimacy.

Adrian was gratified at the result produced by his eloquence.

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Though this lady never expressed an idea, Richard was not mistaken in her cleverness. She could make evenings pass gaily, and one was not the fellow to the other. She could make you forget she was a woman, and then bring the fact startlingly home to you. She could read men with one quiver of her half-closed eyelashes. She could catch the coming mood in a man, and fit herself to it. What does a woman want with ideas, who can do thus much? Keenness of perception, conformity, delicacy of handling, these be all the qualities necessary to parasites.

Love would have scared the youth: she banished it from her tongue. It may also have been true that it sickened her. She played on his higher nature. She understood spontaneously what would be most strange and taking to him in a woman. Various as the Serpent of old Nile, she acted fallen beauty, humorous indifference, reckless daring, arrogance in ruin. And acting thus, what think you?—She did it so well because she was growing half in earnest.

'Richard! I am not what I was since I knew you. You will not give me up quite?'

'Never, Bella.'

'I am not so bad as I'm painted!'

'You are only unfortunate.'

'Now that I know you I think so, and yet I am happier.'

She told him her history when this soft horizon of repentance seemed to throw heaven's twilight across it. A woman's history, you know: certain chapters expunged. It was dark enough to Richard.

'Did you love the man?' he asked. 'You say you love no one now.'

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'Did I love him? He was a nobleman and I a tradesman's daughter. No. I did not love him. I have lived to learn it. And now I should hate him, if I did not despise him.'

'Can you be deceived in love?' said Richard, more to himself than to her.

'Yes. When we're young we can be very easily deceived. If there is such a thing as love, we discover it after we have tossed about and roughed it. Then we find the man, or the woman, that suits us:—and then it's too late! we can't have him.'

'Singular!' murmured Richard, 'she says just what my father said.'

He spoke aloud: 'I could forgive you if you had loved him.'

'Don't be harsh, grave judge! How is a girl to distinguish?'

'You had some affection for him? He was the first?'

She chose to admit that. 'Yes. And the first who talks of love to a girl must be a fool if he doesn't blind her.'

'That makes what is called first love nonsense.'

'Isn't it?'

He repelled the insinuation. 'Because I know it is not, Bella.'

Nevertheless she had opened a wider view of the world to him, and a colder. He thought poorly of girls. A woman—a sensible, brave, beautiful woman seemed, on comparison, infinitely nobler than those weak creatures.

She was best in her character of lovely rebel accusing foul injustice. 'What am I to do? You tell me to be different. How can I? What am I to do? Will

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virtuous people let me earn my bread? I could not get a housemaid's place! They wouldn't have me—I see their noses smelling! Yes: I can go to the hospital and sing behind a screen! Do you expect me to bury myself alive? Why, man, I have blood: I can't become a stone. You say I am honest, and I will be. Then let me tell you that I have been used to luxuries, and I can't do without them. I might have married men—lots would have had me. But who marries one like me but a fool? and I could not marry a fool. The man I marry I must respect. He could not respect me—I should know him to be a fool, and I should be worse off than I am now. As I am now, they may look as pious as they like—I laugh at them!'

And so forth: direr things. Imputations upon wives: horrible exultation at the universal peccancy of husbands. This lovely outcast almost made him think she had the right on her side, so keenly her Parthian arrows pierced the holy centres of society, and exposed its rottenness.

Mrs. Mount's house was discreetly conducted: nothing ever occurred to shock him there. The young man would ask himself where the difference was between her and the women of society? How base, too, was the army of banded hypocrites! He was ready to declare war against them on her behalf. His casus belli, accurately worded, would have read curiously. Because the world refused to lure the lady to virtue with the offer of a housemaid's place, our knight threw down his challenge. But the lady had scornfully rebutted this prospect of a return to chastity. Then the form of the challenge must be:

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Because the world declined to support the lady in luxury for nothing! But what did that mean? In other words: she was to receive the devil's wages without rendering him her services. Such an arrangement appears hardly fair on the world or on the devil. Heroes will have to conquer both before they will get them to subscribe to it.

Heroes, however, are not in the habit of wording their declarations of war at all. Lance in rest they challenge and they charge. Like women they trust to instinct, and graft on it the muscle of men. Wide fly the leisurely-remonstrating hosts: institutions are scattered, they know not wherefore, heads are broken that have not the balm of a reason why. 'Tis instinct strikes! Surely there is something divine in instinct.

Still, war declared, where were these hosts? The hero could not charge down on the ladies and gentlemen in a ball-room, and spoil the quadrille. He had sufficient reticence to avoid sounding his challenge in the Law Courts; nor could he well go into the Houses of Parliament with a trumpet, though to come to a tussle with the nation's direct representatives did seem the likelier method. It was likewise out of the question that he should enter every house and shop, and battle with its master in the cause of Mrs. Mount. Where, then, was his enemy. Everybody was his enemy, and everybody was nowhere! Shall he convoke multitudes on Wimbledon Common? Blue Policemen, and a distant dread of ridicule, bar all his projects. Alas for the hero in our day!

Nothing teaches a strong arm its impotence so much as knocking at empty air.

'What can I do for this poor woman?' cried

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Richard, after fighting his phantom enemy till he was worn out.

'O Rip! old Rip!' he addressed his friend, 'I'm distracted. I wish I was dead! What good am I for? Miserable! selfish! What have I done but make every soul I know wretched about me? I follow my own inclinations—I make people help me by lying as hard as they can—and I'm a liar. And when I've got it I'm ashamed of myself. And now when I do see something unselfish for me to do, I come upon grins—I don't know where to turn—how to act—and I laugh at myself like a devil!'

It was only friend Ripton's ear that was required so his words went for little: but Ripton did say he thought there was small matter to be ashamed of in winning and wearing the Beauty of Earth. Richard added his customary comment of 'Poor little thing!'

He fought his duello with empty air till he was exhausted. A last letter written to his father procured him no reply. Then, said he, I have tried my utmost. I have tried to be dutiful—my father won't listen to me. One thing I can do—I can go down to my dear girl, and make her happy, and save her at least from some of the consequences of my rashness.

'There's nothing better for me!' he groaned. His great ambition must be covered by a house-top: he and the cat must warm themselves on the domestic hearth! The hero was not aware that his heart moved him to this. His heart was not now in open communion with his mind.

Mrs. Mount heard that her friend was going—would go. She knew he was going to his wife. Far from discouraging him, she said nobly: 'Go—I believe I

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have kept you. Let us have an evening together, and then go: for good, if you like. If not, then to meet again another time. Forget me. I sha'n't forget you. You're the best fellow I ever knew, Richard. You are, on my honour! I swear I would not step in between you and your wife to cause either of you a moment's unhappiness. When I can be another woman I will, and I shall think of you then.'

Lady Blandish heard from Adrian that Richard was positively going to his wife. The wise youth modestly veiled his own merit in bringing it about by saying: 'I couldn't see that poor little woman left alone down there any longer.'

'Well! Yes!' said Mrs. Doria, to whom the modest speech was repeated, 'I suppose, poor boy, it's the best he can do now.'

Richard bade them adieu, and went to spend his last evening with Mrs. Mount.

The enchantress received him in state.

'Do you know this dress? No? It's the dress I wore when I first met you—not when I first saw you. I think I remarked you, sir, before you deigned to cast an eye upon humble me. When we first met we drank champagne together, and I intend to celebrate our parting in the same liquor. Will you liquor with me, old boy?'

She was gay. She revived Sir Julius occasionally. He, dispirited, left the talking all to her.

Mrs. Mount kept a footman. At a late hour the man of calves dressed the table for supper. It was a point of honour for Richard to sit down to it and try to eat. Drinking, thanks to the kindly mother nature, who loves to see her children made fools of, is always

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an easier matter. The footman was diligent: the champagne corks feebly recalled the file-firing at Richmond.

'We 'll drink to what we might have been, Dick,' said the enchantress.

Oh, the glorious wreck she looked.

His heart choked as he gulped the buzzing wine.

'What! down, my boy?' she cried. 'They shall never see me hoist signals of distress. We must all die, and the secret of the thing is to die game, by Jove! Did you ever hear of Laura Fenn? a superb girl! handsomer than your humble servant—if you 'll believe it—a "Miss" in the bargain, and as a consequence, I suppose, a much greater rake. She was in the hunting-field. Her horse threw her, and she fell plump on a stake. It went into her left breast. All the fellows crowded round her, and one young man, who was in love with her—he sits in the House of Peers now—we used to call him "Duck" because he was such a dear—he dropped from his horse to his knees: "Laura! Laura! my darling! speak a word to me!—the last!" She turned over all white and bloody! "I—I sha'n't be in at the death!" and gave up the ghost! Wasn't that dying game? Here 's to the example of Laura Fenn! Why, what 's the matter? See! it makes a man turn pale to hear how a woman can die. Fill the glasses, John. Why, you 're as bad!'

'It 's give me a turn, my lady,' pleaded John, and the man's hand was unsteady as he poured out the wine.

'You ought not to listen. Go, and drink some brandy.'

John footman went from the room.

'My brave Dick! Richard! what a face you 've got!'

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He showed a deep frown on a colourless face.

'Can't you bear to hear of blood? You know, it was only one naughty woman out of the world. The clergyman of the parish didn't refuse to give her decent burial. We are Christians! Hurrah!'

She cheered, and laughed. A lurid splendour glanced about her like lights from the pit.

'Pledge me, Dick! Drink, and recover yourself. Who minds? We must all die—the good and the bad. Ashes to ashes—dust to dust—and wine for living lips! That's poetry—almost. Sentiment: "May we never say die till we've drunk our fill!" Not bad—eh? A little vulgar, perhaps, by Jove! Do you think me horrid?'

'Where's the wine?' Richard shouted. He drank a couple of glasses in succession, and stared about. Was he in hell, with a lost soul raving to him?

'Nobly spoken! and nobly acted upon, my brave Dick! Now we'll be companions. "She wished that heaven had made her such a man." Ah, Dick! Dick! too late! too late!'

Softly fell her voice. Her eyes threw slanting beams.

'Do you see this?'

She pointed to a symbolic golden anchor studded with gems and coiled with a rope of hair in her bosom. It was a gift of his.

'Do you know when I stole the lock? Foolish Dick! you gave me an anchor without a rope. Come and see.'

She rose from the table, and threw herself on the sofa.

'Don't you recognize your own hair? I should know a thread of mine among a million.'

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Something of the strength of Samson went out of him as he inspected his hair on the bosom of Delilah.

'And you knew nothing of it! You hardly know it now you see it! What couldn't a woman steal from you? But you're not vain, and that's a protection. You're a miracle, Dick: a man that's not vain! Sit here.' She curled up her feet to give him place on the sofa. 'Now let us talk like friends that part to meet no more. You found a ship with fever on board, and you weren't afraid to come alongside and keep her company. The fever isn't catching, you see. Let us mingle our tears together. Ha! ha! a man said that once to me. The hypocrite wanted to catch the fever, but he was too old. How old are you, Dick?'

Richard pushed a few months forward.

'Twenty-one? You just look it, you blooming boy. Now tell me my age, Adonis!—Twenty—*what*?'

Richard had given the lady twenty-five years.

She laughed violently. 'You don't pay compliments, Dick. Best to be honest; guess again. You don't like to? Not twenty-five, or twenty-four, or twenty-three, or—see how he begins to stare!—twenty-two. Just twenty-one, my dear. I think my birthday's somewhere in next month. Why, look at me, close—closer. Have I a wrinkle?'

'And when, in heaven's name! . . .' he stopped short.

'I understand you. When did I commence for to live? At the ripe age of sixteen I saw a nobleman in despair because of my beauty. He vowed he'd die. I didn't want him to do that. So to save the poor man for his family, I ran away with him, and I dare say

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they didn't appreciate the sacrifice, and he soon forgot to, if he ever did. It 's the way of the world!'

Richard seized some dead champagne, emptied the bottle into a tumbler, and drank it off.

John footman entered to clear the table, and they were left without further interruption.

'Bella! Bella!' Richard uttered in a deep sad voice, as he walked the room.

She leaned on her arm, her hair crushed against a reddened cheek, her eyes half-shut and dreamy.

'Bella!' he dropped beside her. 'You are unhappy.'

She blinked and yawned, as one who is awakened suddenly. 'I think you spoke,' said she.

'You are unhappy, Bella. You can't conceal it. Your laugh sounds like madness. You must be unhappy. So young, too! Only twenty-one!'

'What does it matter? Who cares for me?'

The mighty pity falling from his eyes took in her whole shape. She did not mistake it for tenderness, as another would have done.

'Who cares for you, Bella? I do. What makes my misery now, but to see you there, and know of no way of helping you? Father of mercy! it seems too much to have to stand by powerless while such a ruin is going on!'

Her hand was shaken in his by the passion of torment with which his frame quaked.

Involuntarily a tear started between her eyelids. She glanced up at him quickly, then looked down, drew her hand from his, and smoothed it, eyeing it.

'Bella! you have a father alive!'

'A linendraper, dear. He wears a white neck-cloth.'

This article of apparel instantaneously changed the

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tone of the conversation, for he, rising abruptly, nearly squashed the lady's lap-dog, whose squeaks and howls were piteous, and demanded the most fervent caresses of its mistress. It was: 'Oh, my poor pet Mumpsy, and he didn't like a nasty great big ugly heavy foot on his poor soft silky—mum—mum—back, he didn't, and he soodn't that he—mum—mum—soodn't; and he cried out and knew the place to come to, and was oh so sorry for what had happened to him—mum—mum—mum—and now he was going to be made happy, his mistress make him happy — mum — mum — mum — moo-o-o-o.'

'Yes!' said Richard savagely, from the other end of the room, 'you care for the happiness of your dog.'

'A course se does,' Mumpsy was simperingly assured in the thick of his silky flanks.

Richard looked for his hat. Mumpsy was deposited on the sofa in a twinkling.

'Now,' said the lady, 'you must come and beg Mumpsy's pardon, whether you meant to do it or no, because little doggies can't tell that—how should they? And there's poor Mumpsy thinking you're a great terrible rival that tries to squash him all flat to nothing, on purpose, pretending you didn't see; and he's trembling, poor dear wee pet! And I may love my dog, sir, if I like; and I do; and I won't have him ill-treated, for he's never been jealous of you, and he is a darling, ten times truer than men, and I love him fifty times better. So come to him with me.'

First a smile changed Richard's face; then laughing a melancholy laugh, he surrendered to her humour, and went through the form of begging Mumpsy's pardon.

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'The dear dog! I do believe he saw we were getting dull,' said she.

'And immolated himself intentionally? Noble animal!'

'Well, we'll act as if we thought so. Let us be gay, Richard, and not part like ancient fogies. Where's your fun? You can rattle; why don't you? You haven't seen me in one of my characters—not Sir Julius: wait a couple of minutes.' She ran out.

A white visage reappeared behind a spring of flame. Her black hair was scattered over her shoulders and fell half across her brows. She moved slowly, and came up to him, fastening weird eyes on him, pointing a finger at the region of witches. Sepulchral cadences accompanied the representation. He did not listen, for he was thinking what a deadly charming and exquisitely horrid witch she was. Something in the way her underlids worked seemed to remind him of a forgotten picture; but a veil hung on the picture. There could be no analogy, for this was beautiful and devilish, and that, if he remembered rightly, had the beauty of seraphs.

His reflections and her performance were stayed by a shriek. The spirits of wine had run over the plate she held to the floor. She had the coolness to put the plate down on the table, while he stamped out the flame on the carpet. Again she shrieked: she thought she was on fire. He fell on his knees and clasped her skirts all round, drawing his arms down them several times.

Still kneeling, he looked up, and asked, 'Do you feel safe now?'

She bent her face glaring down till the ends of her hair touched his cheek.

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Said she, 'Do you?'

'Was she a witch verily? There was sorcery in her breath; sorcery in her hair; the ends of it stung him like little snakes.

'How do I do it, Dick?' She flung back laughing.

'Like you do everything, Bella,' he said, and took a breath.

'There! I won't be a witch; I won't be a witch: they may burn me to a cinder, but I won't be a witch!'

She sang, throwing her hair about, and stamping her feet.

'I suppose I look a figure. I must go and tidy myself.'

'No, don't change. I like to see you so.' He gazed at her with a mixture of wonder and admiration. 'I can't think you the same person—not even when you laugh.'

'Richard,' her tone was serious, 'you were going to speak to me of my parents.'

'How wild and awful you looked, Bella!'

'My father, Richard, was a very respectable man.'

'Bella, you 'll haunt me like a ghost.'

'My mother died in my infancy, Richard.'

'Don't put up your hair, Bella.'

'I was an only child!'

Her head shook sorrowfully at the glistening fire-irons. He followed the abstracted intentness of her look, and came upon her words.

'Ah, yes! speak of your father, Bella. Speak of him.'

'Shall I haunt you, and come to your bedside, and cry, "'Tis time!"?'

'Dear Bella! if you will tell me where he lives, I will

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go to him. He shall receive you. He shall not refuse —he shall forgive you.'

'If I haunt you, you can't forget me, Richard.'

'Let me go to your father, Bella—let me go to him to-morrow. I'll give you my time. It's all I can give. O Bella! let me save you.'

'So you like me best dishevelled, do you, you naughty boy! Ha! ha!' and away she burst from him, and up flew her hair, as she danced across the room, and fell at full length on the sofa.

He felt giddy: bewitched.

'We'll talk of everyday things, Dick,' she called to him from the sofa. 'It's our last evening. Our last? Heigho! It makes me sentimental. How's that Mr. Ripson, Pipson, Nipson?—it's not complimentary, but I can't remember names of that sort. Why do you have friends of that sort? He's not a gentleman. Better is he? Well, he's rather *too* insignificant for me. Why do you sit off there? Come to me instantly. There—I'll sit up, and be proper, and you'll have plenty of room. Talk, Dick!'

He was reflecting on the fact that her eyes were brown. They had a haughty sparkle when she pleased, and when she pleased a soft languor circled them. Excitement had dyed her cheeks deep red. He was a youth, and she an enchantress. He a hero; she a female will-o'-the-wisp.

The eyes were languid now, set in rosy colour.

'You will not leave me yet, Richard? not yet?'

He had no thought of departing.

'It's our last night—I suppose it's our last hour together in this world—and I don't want to meet you in the next, for poor Dick will have to come

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to such a very, very disagreeable place to make the visit.'

He grasped her hand at this.

'Yes, he will! too true! can't be helped: They say I 'm handsome.'

'You 're lovely, Bella.'

She drank in his homage.

'Well, we 'll admit it. His Highness below likes lovely women, I hear say. A gentlemen of taste! You don't know all my accomplishments yet, Richard.'

'I sha'n't be astonished at anything new, Bella.'

'Then hear, and wonder.' Her voice trolled out some lively roulades. 'Don't you think he 'll make me his prima donna below? It 's nonsense to tell me there 's no singing there. And the atmosphere will be favourable to the voice. No *damp*, you know. You saw the piano—why didn't you ask me to sing before? I can sing Italian. I had a master—who made love to me. I forgave him because of the music-stool—men can't help it on a music-stool, poor dears!'

She went to the piano, struck the notes, and sang—

'"My heart, my heart—I think 'twill break."

'Because I 'm such a rake. I don't know any other reason. No; I hate sentimental songs. Won't sing that. Ta-tiddy-tiddy-iddy—a . . . e! How ridiculous those women were, coming home from Richmond!

"Once the sweet romance of story
  Clad thy moving form with grace;
Once the world and all its glory
  Was but framework to thy face.
Ah, too fair!—what I remember,
  Might my soul recall—but no!
To the winds this wretched ember
  Of a fire that falls so low!"

'Hum! don't much like that. Tum-te-tum-tum—

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accanto al fuoco—heigho! I don't want to show off, Dick—or to break down—so I won't try that.

"Oh! but for thee, Oh! but for thee,
I might have been a happy wife,
And nursed a baby on my knee,
And never blushed to give it life."

'I used to sing that when I was a girl, sweet Richard, and didn't know at all, at all, what it meant. Mustn't sing that sort of song in company. We're oh! so proper—even we!

"If I had a husband, what think you I'd do?
I'd make it my business to keep him a lover;
For when a young gentleman ceases to woo,
Some other amusement he'll quickly discover."

'For such are young gentlemen made of—made of: such are young gentlemen made of!'

After this trifling she sang a Spanish ballad sweetly. He was in the mood when imagination intensely vivifies everything. Mere suggestions of music sufficed. The lady in the ballad had been wronged. Lo! it was the lady before him; and soft horns blew; he smelt the languid night-flowers; he saw the stars crowd large and close above the arid plain: this lady leaning at her window desolate, pouring out her abandoned heart.

Heroes know little what they owe to champagne.

The lady wandered to Venice. Thither he followed her at a leap. In Venice she was not happy. He was prepared for the misery of any woman anywhere. But, oh! to be with her! To glide with phantom-motion through throbbing streets; past houses muffled in shadow and gloomy legends; under storied bridges; past palaces charged with full life in dead quietness; past grand old towers, colossal squares, gleaming

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quays, and out, and on with her, on into the silver infinity shaking over seas!

Was it the champagne? the music? or the poetry? Something of the two former, perhaps: but most the enchantress playing upon him. How many instruments cannot clever women play upon at the same moment! And this enchantress was not too clever, or he might have felt her touch. She was no longer absolutely bent on winning him, or he might have seen a manœuvre. She liked him—liked none better. She wished him well. Her pique was satisfied. Still he was handsome, and he was going. What she liked him for, she rather—very slightly—wished to do away with, or see if it could be done away with: just as one wishes to catch a pretty butterfly, without hurting its patterned wings. No harm intended to the innocent insect, only one wants to inspect it thoroughly, and enjoy the marvel of it, in one's tender possession, and have the felicity of thinking one could crush it, if one would.

He knew her what she was, this lady. In Seville, or in Venice, the spot was on her. Sailing the pathways of the moon it was not celestial light that illumined her beauty. Her sin was there: but in dreaming to save, he was soft to her sin—drowned it in deep mournfulness.

Silence, and the rustle of her dress, awoke him from his musing. She swam wave-like to the sofa. She was at his feet.

'I have been light and careless to-night, Richard. Of course I meant it. I *must* be happy with my best friend going to leave me.'

Those witch underlids were working brightly.

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'You will not forget me? and I shall try . . . try . . .'

Her lips twitched. She thought him such a very handsome fellow.

'If I change—if I can change . . . Oh! if you could know what a net I'm in, Richard!'

Now at those words, as he looked down on her haggard loveliness, not divine sorrow but a devouring jealousy sprang like fire in his breast, and set him rocking with horrid pain. He bent closer to her pale beseeching face. Her eyes still drew him down.

'Bella! No! no! promise me! swear it!'

'Lost, Richard! lost for ever! give me up!'

He cried: 'I never will!' and strained her in his arms, and kissed her passionately on the lips.

She was not acting now as she sidled and slunk her half-averted head with a kind of maiden shame under his arm, sighing heavily, weeping, clinging to him. It was wicked truth.

Not a word of love between them!

Was ever hero in this fashion won?

CHAPTER XXXIX

The Little Bird and the Falcon: a Berry to the rescue!

At a season when the pleasant South-western Island has few attractions to other than invalids and hermits enamoured of wind and rain, the potent nobleman, Lord Mountfalcon, still lingered there to the disgust of his friends and special parasite. 'Mount's in for

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it again,' they said among themselves. 'Hang the women!' was a natural sequence. For, don't you see, what a shame it was of the women to be always kindling such a very inflammable subject! All understood that Cupid had twanged his bow, and transfixed a peer of Britain for the fiftieth time: but none would perceive, though he vouched for it with his most eloquent oaths, that this was a totally different case from the antecedent ones. So it had been sworn to them too frequently before. He was as a man with mighty tidings, and no language: intensely communicative, but inarticulate. Good round oaths had formerly compassed and expounded his noble emotions. They were now quite beyond the comprehension of blasphemy, even when emphasized, and by this the poor lord divinely felt the case was different. There is something impressive in a great human hulk writhing under the unutterable torments of a mastery he cannot contend with, or account for, or explain by means of intelligible words. At first he took refuge in the depths of his contempt for women. Cupid gave him line. When he had come to vent his worst of them, the fair face now stamped on his brain beamed the more triumphantly: so the harpooned whale rose to the surface, and after a few convulsions, surrendered his huge length. My lord was in love with Richard's young wife. He gave proofs of it by burying himself beside her. To her, could she have seen it, he gave further proofs of a real devotion, in affecting, and in her presence feeling, nothing beyond a lively interest in her well-being. This wonder, that when near her he should be cool and composed, and when away from her wrapped in a tempest of desires, was matter

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for what powers of cogitation the heavy nobleman possessed.

The Hon. Peter, tired of his journeys to and fro, urged him to press the business. Lord Mountfalcon was wiser, or more scrupulous, than his parasite. Almost every evening he saw Lucy. The inexperienced little wife apprehended no harm in his visits. Moreover, Richard had commended her to the care of Lord Mountfalcon, and Lady Judith. Lady Judith had left the Island for London: Lord Mountfalcon remained. There could be no harm. If she had ever thought so, she no longer did. Secretly, perhaps, she was flattered. Lord Mountfalcon was as well educated as it is the fortune of the run of titled elder sons to be: he could talk and instruct: he was a lord: and he let her understand that he was wicked, very wicked, and that she improved him. The heroine, in common with the hero, has her ambition to be of use in the world—to do some good: and the task of reclaiming a bad man is extremely seductive to good women. Dear to their tender bosoms as old china is a bad man they are mending! Lord Mountfalcon had none of the arts of a libertine: his gold, his title, and his person, had hitherto preserved him from having long to sigh in vain, or sigh at all, possibly: the Hon. Peter did his villanies for him. No alarm was given to Lucy's pure instinct, as might have been the case had my lord been over-adept. It was nice in her martyrdom to have a true friend to support her, and really to be able to do something for that friend. Too simple-minded to think much of his lordship's position, she was yet a woman. 'He, a great nobleman, does not scorn to acknowledge me, and think something of me,' may

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have been one of the half-thoughts passing through her now and then, as she reflected in self-defence on the proud family she had married into.

January was watering and freezing old earth by turns, when the Hon. Peter travelled down to the sun of his purse with great news. He had no sooner broached his lordship's immediate weakness, than Mountfalcon began to plunge like a heavy dragoon in difficulties. He swore by this and that he had come across an angel for his sins, and would do her no hurt. The next moment he swore she must be his, though she cursed like a cat. His lordship's illustrations were not choice. 'I haven't advanced an inch,' he groaned. 'Brayder! upon my soul, that little woman could do anything with me. By heaven! I'd marry her to-morrow. Here I am, seeing her every day in the week out or in, and what do you think she gets me to talk about?—history! Isn't it enough to make a fellow mad? and there am I lecturing like a prig, and by heaven! while I'm at it I feel a pleasure in it; and when I leave the house I should feel an immense gratification in shooting somebody. What do they say in town?'

'Not much,' said Brayder significantly.

'When's that fellow—her husband—coming down?'

'I rather hope we've settled him for life, Mount.'

Nobleman and parasite exchanged looks.

'How d'ye mean?'

Brayder hummed an air, and broke it to say, 'He's in for Don Juan at a gallop, that's all.'

'The deuce! Has Bella got him?' Mountfalcon asked with eagerness.

Brayder handed my lord a letter. It was dated from

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the Sussex coast, signed 'Richard,' and was worded thus:

'My beautiful Devil!—

'Since we're both devils together, and have found each other out, come to me at once, or I shall be going somewhere in a hurry. Come, my bright hell-star! I ran away from you, and now I ask you to come to me! You have taught me how devils love, and I can't do without you. Come an hour after you receive this.'

Mountfalcon turned over the letter to see if there was any more. 'Complimentary love-epistle!' he remarked, and rising from his chair and striding about, muttered, 'The dog! how infamously he treats his wife!'

'Very bad,' said Brayder.

'How did you get hold of this?'

'Strolled into Bella's dressing-room, waiting for her—turned over her pincushion hap-hazard. You know her trick.'

'By Jove! I think that girl does it on purpose. Thank heaven, I haven't written her any letters for an age. Is she going to him?'

'Not she! But it's odd, Mount!—did you ever know her refuse money before? She tore up the cheque in style, and presented me the fragments with two or three of the delicacies of language she learnt at your Academy. I rather like to hear a woman swear. It embellishes her!'

Mountfalcon took counsel of his parasite as to the end the letter could be made to serve. Both conscientiously agreed that Richard's behaviour to his wife was infamous, and that he at least deserved no

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mercy. 'But,' said his lordship, 'it won't do to show the letter. At first she'll be swearing it's false, and then she'll stick to him closer. I know the sluts.'

'The rule of contrary,' said Brayder carelessly. 'She must see the trahison with her eyes. They believe their eyes. There's your chance, Mount. You step in: you give her revenge and consolation—two birds at one shot. That's what they like.'

'You're an ass, Brayder,' the nobleman exclaimed. 'You're an infernal blackguard. You talk of this little woman as if she and other women were all of a piece. I don't see anything I gain by this confounded letter. Her husband's a brute—that's clear.'

'Will you leave it to me, Mount?'

'Be damned before I do!' muttered my lord.

'Thank you. Now see how this will end. You're too soft, Mount. You'll be made a fool of.'

'I tell you, Brayder, there's nothing to be done. If I carry her off—I've been on the point of doing it every day—what'll come of that? She'll look—I can't stand her eyes—I shall be a fool—worse off with her than I am now.'

Mountfalcon yawned despondently. 'And what do you think?' he pursued. 'Isn't it enough to make a fellow gnash his teeth? She's . . .' he mentioned something in an underbreath, and turned red as he said it.

'Hm!' Brayder put up his mouth and rapped the handle of his cane on his chin. 'That's disagreeable, Mount. You don't exactly want to act in that character. You haven't got a diploma. Bother!'

'Do you think I love her a bit less?' broke out my lord in a frenzy. 'By heaven! I'd read to her by her

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bedside, and talk that infernal history to her, if it pleased her, all day and all night.'

'You're evidently graduating for a midwife, Mount.'

The nobleman appeared silently to accept the imputation.

'What do they say in town?' he asked again.

Brayder said the sole question was, whether it was maid, wife, or widow.

'I'll go to her this evening,' Mountfalcon resumed, after—to judge by the cast of his face—reflecting deeply. 'I'll go to her this evening. She shall know what infernal torment she makes me suffer.'

'Do you mean to say she don't know it?'

'Hasn't an idea—thinks me a friend. And so, by heaven! I'll be to her.'

'A—hm!' went the Honourable Peter. 'This way to the sign of the Green Man, ladies!'

'Do you want to be pitched out of the window, Brayder?'

'Once was enough, Mount. The Salvage Man is strong. I may have forgotten the trick of alighting on my feet. There—there! I'll be sworn she's excessively innocent, and thinks you a disinterested friend.'

'I'll go to her this evening,' Mountfalcon repeated. 'She shall know what damned misery it is to see her in such a position. I can't hold out any longer. Deceit's horrible to such a girl as that. I'd rather have her cursing me than speaking and looking as she does. Dear little girl!—she's only a child. You haven't an idea how sensible that little woman is.'

'Have you?' inquired the cunning one.

'My belief is, Brayder, that there are angels among

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women,' said Mountfalcon, evading his parasite's eye as he spoke.

To the world, Lord Mountfalcon was the thoroughly wicked man; his parasite simply ingeniously dissipated. Full many a man of God had thought it the easier task to reclaim the Hon. Peter.

Lucy received her noble friend by firelight that evening, and sat much in the shade. She offered to have the candles brought in. He begged her to allow the room to remain as it was. 'I have something to say to you,' he observed with a certain solemnity.

'Yes—to me?' said Lucy quickly.

Lord Mountfalcon knew he had a great deal to say, but how to say it, and what it exactly was, he did not know.

'You conceal it admirably,' he began, 'but you must be very lonely here—I fear, unhappy.'

'I should have been lonely, but for your kindness, my lord,' said Lucy. 'I am not unhappy.' Her face was in shade and could not belie her.

'Is there any help that one who would really be your friend might give you, Mrs. Feverel?'

'None indeed that I know of,' Lucy replied. 'Who can help us to pay for our sins?'

'At least you may permit me to endeavour to pay my debts, since you have helped me to wash out some of *my* sins.'

'Ah, my lord!' said Lucy, not displeased. It is sweet for a woman to believe she had drawn the serpent's teeth.

'I tell you the truth,' Lord Mountfalcon went on. 'What object could I have in deceiving you? I know

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you quite above flattery — so different from other women!'

'Oh, pray, do not say that,' interposed Lucy.

'According to my experience, then.'

'But you say you have met such—such very bad women.'

'I have. And now that I meet a good one, it is my misfortune.'

'Your misfortune, Lord Mountfalcon?'

'Yes, and I might say more.'

His lordship held impressively mute.

'How strange men are!' thought Lucy. 'He has some unhappy secret.'

Tom Bakewell, who had a habit of coming into the room on various pretences during the nobleman's visits, put a stop to the revelation, if his lordship intended to make any.

When they were alone again, Lucy said, smiling: 'Do you know, I am always ashamed to ask you to begin to read.'

Mountfalcon stared. 'To read?—oh! ha! yes!' he remembered his evening duties. 'Very happy, I'm sure. Let me see. Where were we?'

'The life of the Emperor Julian. But indeed I feel quite ashamed to ask you to read, my lord. It's new to me; like a new world—hearing about Emperors, and armies, and things that really have been on the earth we walk upon. It fills my mind. But it must have ceased to interest you, and I was thinking that I would not tease you any more.'

'Your pleasure is mine, Mrs. Feverel. 'Pon my honour, I'd read till I was hoarse, to hear your remarks.'

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'Are you laughing at me?'

'Do I look so?'

Lord Mountfalcon had fine full eyes, and by merely dropping the lids he could appear to endow them with mental expression.

'No, you are not,' said Lucy. 'I must thank you for your forbearance.'

The nobleman went on his honour loudly.

Now it was an object of Lucy's to have him reading; for his sake, for her sake, and for somebody else's sake; which somebody else was probably considered first in the matter. When he was reading to her, he seemed to be legitimizing his presence there; and though she had no doubts or suspicions whatever, she was easier in her heart while she had him employed in that office. So she rose to fetch the book, laid it open on the table at his lordship's elbow, and quietly waited to ring for candles when he should be willing to commence.

That evening Lord Mountfalcon could not get himself up to the farce, and he felt a pity for the strangely innocent unprotected child with anguish hanging over her, that withheld the words he wanted to speak, or insinuate. He sat silent and did nothing.

'What I do not like him for,' said Lucy meditatively, 'is his changing his religion. He would have been such a hero, but for that. I could have loved him.'

'Who is it you could have loved, Mrs. Feverel?' Lord Mountfalcon asked.

'The Emperor Julian.'

'Oh! the Emperor Julian! Well, he was an apostate: but then, you know, he meant what he was about. He didn't even do it for a woman.'

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'For a woman!' cried Lucy. 'What man would for a woman?'

'I would.'

'You, Lord Mountfalcon?'

'Yes. I'd turn Catholic to-morrow.'

'You make me very unhappy if you say that, my lord.'

'Then I'll unsay it.'

Lucy slightly shuddered. She put her hand upon the bell to ring for lights.

'Do you reject a convert, Mrs. Feverel?' said the nobleman.

'Oh yes! yes! I do. One who does not give his conscience I would not have.'

'If he gives his heart and body, can he give more?'

Lucy's hand pressed the bell. She did not like the doubtful light with one who was so unscrupulous. Lord Mountfalcon had never spoken in this way before. He spoke better, too. She missed the aristocratic twang in his voice, and the hesitation for words, and the fluid lordliness with which he rolled over difficulties in speech.

Simultaneously with the sounding of the bell the door opened, and presented Tom Bakewell. There was a double knock at the same instant at the street door. Lucy delayed to give orders.

'Can it be a letter, Tom?—so late?' she said, changing colour. 'Pray run and see.'

'That an't a powst,' Tom remarked, as he obeyed his mistress.

'Are you very anxious for a letter, Mrs. Feverel?' Lord Mountfalcon inquired.

'Oh, no!—yes, I am, very!' said Lucy. Her quick ear caught the tones of a voice she remembered.

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'That dear old thing has come to see me,' she cried, starting up.

Tom ushered a bunch of black satin into the room.

'Mrs. Berry!' said Lucy, running up to her and kissing her.

'Me, my darlin'!' Mrs. Berry, breathless and rosy with her journey, returned the salute. 'Me truly it is, in fault of a better, for I ain't one to stand by and give the devil his licence—roamin'! and the salt sure enough have spilte my bride-gown at the beginnin', which ain't the best sign. Bless ye!—Oh, here he is.' She beheld a male figure in a chair by the half light, and swung round to address him. 'You bad man!' she held aloft one of her fat fingers, 'I've come on ye like a bolt, I have, and goin' to make ye do your duty, naughty boy! But you're my darlin' babe,' she melted, as was her custom, 'and I'll never meet you and not give to ye the kiss of a mother.'

Before Lord Mountfalcon could find time to expostulate the soft woman had him by the neck, and was down among his luxurious whiskers.

'Ha!' She gave a smothered shriek, and fell back. 'What hair's that?'

Tom Bakewell just then illumined the transaction.

'Oh, my gracious!' Mrs. Berry breathed with horror, 'I been and kiss a strange man!'

Lucy, half-laughing, but in dreadful concern, begged the noble lord to excuse the woeful mistake.

'Extremely flattered, highly favoured, I'm sure,' said his lordship, re-arranging his disconcerted moustache; 'may I beg the pleasure of an introduction?'

'My husband's dear old nurse—Mrs. Berry,' said

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Lucy, taking her hand to lend her countenance. 'Lord Mountfalcon, Mrs. Berry.'

Mrs. Berry sought grace while she performed a series of apologetic bobs, and wiped the perspiration from her forehead.

Lucy put her into a chair: Lord Mountfalcon asked for an account of her passage over to the Island; receiving distressingly full particulars, by which it was revealed that the softness of her heart was only equalled by the weakness of her stomach. The recital calmed Mrs. Berry down.

'Well, and where's my—where's Mr. Richard? yer husband, my dear?' Mrs. Berry turned from her tale to question.

'Did you expect to see him here?' said Lucy in a broken voice.

'And where else, my love? since he haven't been seen in London a whole fortnight.'

Lucy did not speak.

'We will dismiss the Emperor Julian till to-morrow, I think,' said Lord Mountfalcon rising and bowing.

Lucy gave him her hand with mute thanks. He touched it distantly, embraced Mrs. Berry in a farewell bow and was shown out of the house by Tom Bakewell.

The moment he was gone, Mrs. Berry threw up her arms. 'Did ye ever know sich a horrid thing to go and happen to a virtous woman!' she exclaimed. 'I could cry at it, I could! To be goin' and kissin' a strange hairy man! Oh, dear me! what's comin' next, I wonder? Whiskers! thinks I—for I know the touch o' whiskers—'t ain't like other hair—what! have he growed a crop that sudden, I says to myself;

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and it flashed on me I been and made a awful mistake! and the lights come in, and I see that great hairy man —beggin' his pardon—nobleman, and if I could 'a dropped through the floor out o' sight o' men, drat 'em! they're al'ays in the way, that they are——!'

'Mrs. Berry,' Lucy checked her, 'did you expect to find him here?'

'Askin' that solemn?' retorted Berry. 'What him? your husband? O' course I did! and you got him—somewheres hid.'

'I have not heard from my husband for fifteen days,' said Lucy, and her tears rolled heavily off her cheeks.

'Not heer from him!—fifteen days!' Berry echoed.

'O Mrs. Berry! dear kind Mrs. Berry! have you no news? nothing to tell me! I've borne it so long. They're cruel to me, Mrs. Berry. Oh, do you know if I have offended him—my husband? While he wrote I did not complain. I could live on his letters for years. But not to hear from him! To think I have ruined him, and that he repents! Do they want to take him from me? Do they want me dead? O Mrs. Berry! I've had no one to speak out my heart to all this time, and I cannot, cannot help crying, Mrs. Berry!'

Mrs. Berry was inclined to be miserable at what she heard from Lucy's lips, and she was herself full of dire apprehension; but it was never this excellent creature's system to be miserable in company. The sight of a sorrow that was not positive, and could not refer to proof, set her resolutely the other way.

'Fiddle-faddle,' she said. 'I'd like to see him repent! He won't find anywheres a beauty like his own dear little wife, and he know it. Now, look you

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here, my dear—you blessed weepin' pet—the man that could see ye with that hair of yours there in ruins, and he backed by the law, and not rush into your arms and hold ye squeezed for life, he ain't got much man in him, I say; and no one can say that of my babe! I was sayin', look here, to comfort ye—Oh, why, to be sure he've got some surprise for ye. And so've I, my lamb! Hark, now! His father've come to town, like a good reasonable man at last, to u-nite ye both, and bring your bodies together, as your hearts is, for everlastin'. Now ain't that news?'

'Oh!' cried Lucy, 'that takes my last hope away. I thought he had gone to his father.' She burst into fresh tears.

Mrs. Berry paused, disturbed.

'Belike he's travellin' after him,' she suggested.

'Fifteen days, Mrs. Berry!'

'Ah, fifteen weeks, my dear, after sich a man as that. He's a regular meteor, is Sir Austin Feverel, Raynham Abbey. Well, so hark you here. I says to myself, that knows him—for I did think my babe *was* in his natural nest—I says, the bar'net'll never write for you both to come up and beg forgiveness, so down I'll go and fetch you up. For there was your mistake, my dear, ever to leave your husband to go away from ye one hour in a young marriage. It's dangerous, it's mad, it's wrong, and it's only to be righted by your obeyin' of me, as I commands it: for I has my fits, though I *am* a soft 'un. Obey me, and ye'll be happy to-morrow—or the next to it.'

Lucy was willing to see comfort. She was weary of her self-inflicted martyrdom, and glad to give herself up to somebody else's guidance utterly.

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'But why does he not write to me, Mrs. Berry?'

''Cause, 'cause—who can tell the why of men, my dear? But that he love ye faithful, I'll swear. Haven't he groaned in my arms that he couldn't come to ye? —weak wretch! Hasn't he swore how he loved ye to me, poor young man! But this is your fault, my sweet. Yes, it be. You should 'a followed my 'dvice at the fust—'stead o' going into your 'eroics about this and t'other.' Here Mrs. Berry poured forth fresh sentences on matrimony, pointed especially at young couples. 'I should 'a been a fool if I hadn't suffered myself,' she confessed, 'so I'll thank my Berry if I makes you wise in season.'

Lucy smoothed her ruddy plump cheeks, and gazed up affectionately into the soft woman's kind brown eyes. Endearing phrases passed from mouth to mouth. And as she gazed Lucy blushed, as one who has something very secret to tell, very sweet, very strange, but cannot quite bring herself to speak it.

'Well! there's three men in my life I kissed,' said Mrs. Berry, too much absorbed in her extraordinary adventure to notice the young wife's struggling bosom, 'three men, and one a nobleman! He've got more whisker than my Berry. I wonder what the man thought. Ten to one he'll think, now, I was glad o' my chance—they're that vain, whether they's lords or commons. How was I to know? I nat'ral thinks none but her husband'd sit in that chair. Ha! and in the dark? and alone with ye?' Mrs. Berry hardened her eyes, 'and your husband away? What do this mean? Tell to me, child, what it mean his bein' here alone without ere a candle?'

'Lord Mountfalcon is the only friend I have here,'

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said Lucy. 'He is very kind. He comes almost every evening.'

'Lord Muntfalcon—that his name!' Mrs. Berry exclaimed. 'I been that flurried by the man, I didn't mind it at first. He come every evenin', and your husband out o' sight! My goodness me! it's gettin' worse and worse. And what do he come for, now, ma'am? Now tell me candid what ye do together here in the dark of an evenin'.'

Mrs. Berry glanced severely.

'O Mrs. Berry! please not to speak in that way—I don't like it,' said Lucy pouting.

'What do he come for, I ask?'

'Because he is kind, Mrs. Berry. He sees me very lonely, and wishes to amuse me. And he tells me of things I know nothing about and——'

'And wants to be a teachin' some of his things, mayhap,' Mrs. Berry interrupted with a ruffled breast.

'You are a very ungenerous, suspicious, naughty old woman,' said Lucy, chiding her.

'And you're a silly, unsuspectin' little bird,' Mrs. Berry retorted, as she returned her taps on the cheek. 'You haven't told me what ye do together, and what's his excuse for comin'.'

'Well, then, Mrs. Berry, almost every evening that he comes we read History, and he explains the battles, and talks to me about the great men. And *he* says I'm not silly, Mrs. Berry.'

'That's one bit o' lime on your wings, my bird. History, indeed! History to a young married lovely woman alone in the dark! a pretty History! Why, I know that man's name, my dear. He's a notorious

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living rake, that Lord Muntfalcon. No woman's safe with him.'

'Ah, but he hasn't deceived me, Mrs. Berry. He has not pretended he was good.'

'More's his art,' quoth the experienced dame. 'So you read History together in the dark, my dear!'

'I was unwell to-night, Mrs. Berry. I wanted him not to see my face. Look! there's the book open ready for him when the candles come in. And now, you dear kind darling old thing, let me kiss you for coming to me. I do love you. Talk of other things.'

'So we will,' said Mrs. Berry, softening to Lucy's caresses. 'So let us. A nobleman, indeed! alone with a young wife in the dark, and she sich a beauty! I say this shall be put a stop to now and henceforth, on the spot it shall! He won't meneuvle Bessy Berry with his arts. There! I drop him. I'm dyin' for a cup o' tea, my dear.'

Lucy got up to ring the bell, and as Mrs. Berry, incapable of quite dropping him, was continuing to say: 'Let him go and boast I kiss him; he ain't nothin' to be 'shamed of in a chaste woman's kiss—unawares—which men don't get too often in their lives, I can assure 'em';—her eye surveyed Lucy's figure.

Lo, when Lucy returned to her, Mrs. Berry surrounded her with her arms, and drew her into feminine depths. 'Oh, you blessed!' she cried in most meaning tone, 'you good, lovin', proper little wife, you!'

'What is it, Mrs. Berry!' lisps Lucy, opening the most innocent blue eyes.

'As if *I* couldn't see, you pet! It was my flurry

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blinded me, or I'd 'a marked ye the fust shock. Thinkin' to deceive me!'

Mrs. Berry's eyes spoke generations. Lucy's wavered; she coloured all over, and hid her face on the bounteous breast that mounted to her.

'You're a sweet one,' murmured the soft woman, patting her back, and rocking her. 'You're a rose, you are! and a bud on your stalk. Haven't told a word to your husband, my dear?' she asked quickly.

Lucy shook her head, looking sly and shy.

'That's right. We'll give him a surprise; let it come all at once on him, and thinks he—losin' breath —"I'm a father!" Nor a hint even you haven't give him?'

Lucy kissed her, to indicate it was quite a secret.

'Oh! you *are* a sweet one,' said Bessy Berry, and rocked her more closely and lovingly.

Then these two had a whispered conversation, from which let all of male persuasion retire a space nothing under one mile.

Returning, after a due interval, we see Mrs. Berry counting on her fingers' ends. Concluding the sum, she cries prophetically: 'Now this right everything—a baby in the balance! Now I say this angel-infant come from on high. It's God's messenger, my love! and it's not wrong to say so. He thinks you worthy, or you wouldn't 'a had one—not for all the tryin' in the world, you wouldn't, and some tries hard enough, poor creatures! Now let us rejice and make merry! I'm for cryin' and laughin', one and the same. This is the blessed seal of matrimony, which Berry never stamp on me. It's be hoped it's a boy. Make that man a grandfather, and his grandchild a son, and you got him

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safe. Oh! this is what I call happiness, and I 'll have my tea a little stronger in consequence. I declare I could get tipsy to know this joyful news!'

So Mrs. Berry carolled. She had her tea a little stronger. She ate and she drank; she rejoiced and made merry. The bliss of the chaste was hers.

Says Lucy demurely: 'Now you know why I read History, and that sort of books.'

'Do I?' replies Berry. 'Belike I do. Since what you done 's so good, my darlin', I 'm agreeable to anything. A fig for all the lords! They can't come anigh a baby. You may read Voyages and Travels, my dear, and Romances, and Tales of Love and War. You cut the riddle in your own dear way, and that 's all I cares for.'

'No, but you don't understand,' persists Lucy. 'I only read sensible books, and talk of serious things, because I 'm sure . . . because I have heard say . . . dear Mrs. Berry! don't you understand now?'

Mrs. Berry smacked her knees. 'Only to think of her bein' that thoughtful! and she a Catholic, too! Never tell me that people of one religion ain't as good as another, after that. Why, you want to make him a historian, to be sure! And that rake of a lord who 've been comin' here playin' at wolf, you been and made him—unbeknown to himself—sort o' tutor to the unborn blessed! Ha! ha! say that little women ain't got art ekal to the cunningest of 'em. Oh! I understand. Why, to be sure, didn't I know a lady, a widow of a clergyman: he was a postermost child, and afore his birth that woman read nothin' but Blair's "Grave" over and over again, from the end to the beginnin';—that 's a serious book!—very hard readin'!—and at

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four year of age that child that come of it reelly was the piousest infant!—he was like a little curate. His eyes was up; he talked se solemn.' Mrs. Berry imitated the little curate's appearance and manner of speaking. 'So she got her wish, for one!'

But at this lady Lucy laughed.

They chattered on happily till bedtime. Lucy arranged for Mrs. Berry to sleep with her. 'If it's not dreadful to ye, my sweet, sleepin' beside a woman,' said Mrs. Berry. 'I know it were to me shortly after my Berry, and I felt it. It don't somehow seem nat'ral after matrimony—a woman in your bed! I was obliged to have somebody, for the cold sheets do give ye the creeps when you've been used to that that's different.'

Upstairs they went together, Lucy not sharing these objections. Then Lucy opened certain drawers, and exhibited pretty caps, and laced linen, all adapted for a very small body, all the work of her own hands: and Mrs. Berry praised them and her. 'You been guessing a boy—womanlike,' she said. Then they cooed, and kissed, and undressed by the fire, and knelt at the bedside, with their arms about each other, praying; both praying for the unborn child; and Mrs. Berry pressed Lucy's waist the moment she was about to breathe the petition to heaven to shield and bless that coming life; and thereat Lucy closed to her, and felt a strong love for her. Then Lucy got into bed first, leaving Berry to put out the light, and before she did so, Berry leaned over her, and eyed her roguishly, saying, 'I never see ye like this, but I'm half in love with ye myself, you blushin' beauty! Sweet's your eyes, and your hair do take one so—lyin' back.

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I'd never forgive my father if he kep' me away from ye four-and-twenty hours just. Husband o' that!' Berry pointed at the young wife's loveliness. 'Ye look so ripe with kisses, and there they are a-langishin'!— . . . You never look so but in your bed, ye beauty! —just as it ought to be.' Lucy had to pretend to rise to put out the light before Berry would give up her amorous chaste soliloquy. Then they lay in bed, and Mrs. Berry fondled her, and arranged for their departure to-morrow, and reviewed Richard's emotions when he came to hear he was going to be made a father by her, and hinted at Lucy's delicious shivers when Richard was again in his rightful place, which she, Bessy Berry, now usurped; and all sorts of amorous sweet things; enough to make one fancy the adage subverted, that stolen fruits are sweetest; she drew such glowing pictures of bliss within the law and the limits of the conscience, till at last, worn out, Lucy murmured 'Peepy, dear Berry,' and the soft woman gradually ceased her chirp.

Bessy Berry did not sleep. She lay thinking of the sweet brave heart beside her, and listening to Lucy's breath as it came and went; squeezing the fair sleeper's hand now and then, to ease her love as her affections warmed. A storm of wind came howling over the Hampshire hills, and sprang white foam on the water, and shook the bare trees. It passed, leaving a thin cloth of snow on the wintry land. The moon shone brilliantly. Berry heard the house-dog bark. His bark was savage and persistent. She was roused by the noise. By and by she fancied she heard a movement in the house; then it seemed to her that the house-door opened. She cocked her ears, and could almost

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make out voices in the midnight stillness. She slipped from the bed, locked and bolted the door of the room, assured herself of Lucy's unconsciousness, and went on tiptoe to the window. The trees all stood white to the north; the ground glittered; the cold was keen. Berry wrapped her fat arms across her bosom, and peeped as close over into the garden as the situation of the window permitted. Berry was a soft, not a timid, woman: and it happened this night that her thoughts were above the fears of the dark. She was sure of the voices; curiosity without a shade of alarm held her on the watch; and gathering bundles of her day-apparel round her neck and shoulders, she silenced the chattering of her teeth as well as she could, and remained stationary. The low hum of the voices came to a break; something was said in a louder tone; the house-door quietly shut; a man walked out of the garden into the road. He paused opposite her window, and Berry let the blind go back to its place, and peeped from behind an edge of it. He was in the shadow of the house, so that it was impossible to discern much of his figure. After some minutes he walked rapidly away, and Berry returned to the bed an icicle, from which Lucy's limbs sensitively shrank.

Next morning Mrs. Berry asked Tom Bakewell if he had been disturbed in the night. Tom, the mysterious, said he had slept like a top. Mrs. Berry went into the garden. The snow was partially melted; all save one spot, just under the portal, and there she saw the print of a man's foot. By some strange guidance it occurred to her to go and find one of Richard's boots. She did so, and, unperceived, she measured the sole of the boot

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in that solitary footmark. There could be no doubt that it fitted. She tried it from heel to toe a dozen times.

CHAPTER XL

Clare's Diary

Sir Austin Feverel had come to town with the serenity of a philosopher who says, 'Tis now time; and the satisfaction of a man who has not arrived thereat without a struggle. He had almost forgiven his son. His deep love for him had well-nigh shaken loose from wounded pride and more tenacious vanity. Stirrings of a remote sympathy for the creature who had robbed him of his son and hewed at his System, were in his heart of hearts. This he knew; and in his own mind he took credit for his softness. But the world must not suppose him soft; the world must think he was still acting on his System. Otherwise what would his long absence signify?—Something highly unphilosophical. So, though love was strong, and was moving him to a straightforward course, the last tug of vanity drew him still aslant.

The Aphorist read himself so well, that to juggle with himself was a necessity. As he wished the world to see him, he beheld himself: one who entirely put aside mere personal feelings: one in whom parental duty, based on the science of life, was paramount: a Scientific Humanist, in short.

He was, therefore, rather surprised at a coldness in Lady Blandish's manner when he did appear. 'At last!' said the lady, in a sad way that sounded

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reproachfully. Now the Scientific Humanist had, of course, nothing to reproach himself with.

But where was Richard?

Adrian positively averred he was not with his wife.

'If he had gone,' said the baronet, 'he would have anticipated me by a few hours.'

This, when repeated to Lady Blandish, should have propitiated her, and shown his great forgiveness. She, however, sighed, and looked at him wistfully.

Their converse was not happy and deeply intimate. Philosophy did not seem to catch her mind; and fine phrases encountered a rueful assent, more flattering to their grandeur than to their influence.

Days went by. Richard did not present himself. Sir Austin's pitch of self-command was to await the youth without signs of impatience.

Seeing this, the lady told him her fears for Richard, and mentioned the rumour of him that was about.

'If,' said the baronet, 'this person, his wife, is what you paint her, I do not share your fears for him. I think too well of him. If she is one to inspire the sacredness of that union, I think too well of him. It is impossible.'

The lady saw one thing to be done.

'Call her to you,' she said. 'Have her with you at Raynham. Recognize her. It is the disunion and doubt that so confuses him and drives him wild. I confess to you I hoped he had gone to her. It seems not. If she is with you his way will be clear. Will you do that?'

Science is notoriously of slow movement. Lady Blandish's proposition was far too hasty for Sir Austin. Women, rapid by nature, have no idea of science.

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'We shall see her there in time, Emmeline. At present let it be between me and my son.'

He spoke loftily. In truth it offended him to be asked to do anything, when he had just brought himself to do so much.

A month elapsed, and Richard appeared on the scene.

The meeting between him and his father was not what his father had expected, and had crooned over in the Welsh mountains. Richard shook his hand respectfully, and inquired after his health with the common social solicitude. He then said: 'During your absence, sir, I have taken the liberty, without consulting you, to do something in which you are more deeply concerned than myself. I have taken upon myself to find out my mother and place her under my care. I trust you will not think that I have done wrong. I acted as I thought best.'

Sir Austin replied: 'You are of an age, Richard, to judge for yourself in such a case. I would have you simply beware of deceiving yourself in imagining that you considered any one but yourself in acting as you did.'

'I have not deceived myself, sir,' said Richard, and the interview was over. Both hated an exposure of the feelings, and in that both were satisfied: but the baronet, as one who loves, hoped and looked for tones indicative of trouble and delight in the deep heart; and Richard gave him none of those. The young man did not even face him as he spoke: if their eyes met by chance, Richard's were deflantly cold. His whole bearing was changed.

'This rash marriage has altered him,' said the very

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just man of science in life; and that meant: 'it has debased him.'

He pursued his reflections. 'I see in him the desperate maturity of a suddenly-ripened nature: and but for my faith that good work is never lost, what should I think of the toil of my years? Lost, perhaps to me! lost to him! It may show itself in his children.'

The Philosopher, we may conceive, has contentment in benefiting embryos: but it was a somewhat bitter prospect to Sir Austin. Bitterly he felt the injury to himself.

One little incident spoke well of Richard. A poor woman called at the hotel while he was missing. The baronet saw her, and she told him a tale that threw Christian light on one part of Richard's nature. But this might gratify the father in Sir Austin; it did not touch the man of science. A Feverel, his son, would not do less, he thought. He sat down deliberately to study his son.

No definite observations enlightened him. Richard ate and drank; joked and laughed. He was generally before Adrian in calling for a fresh bottle. He talked easily of current topics; his gaiety did not sound forced. In all he did, nevertheless, there was not the air of a youth who sees a future before him. Sir Austin put that down. It might be carelessness, and wanton blood, for no one could say he had much on his mind. The man of science was not reckoning that Richard also might have learned to act and wear a mask. Dead subjects—that is to say, people not on their guard—he could penetrate and dissect. It is by a rare chance, as scientific men well know, that one has an opportunity of examining the structure of the living.

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However, that rare chance was granted to Sir Austin. They were engaged to dine with Mrs. Doria at the Foreys, and walked down to her in the afternoon, father and son arm-in-arm, Adrian beside them. Previously the offended father had condescended to inform his son that it would shortly be time for him to return to his wife, indicating that arrangements would ultimately be ordered to receive her at Raynham. Richard had replied nothing; which might mean excess of gratitude, or hypocrisy in concealing his pleasure, or any one of the thousand shifts by which gratified human nature expresses itself when all is made to run smooth with it. Now Mrs. Berry had her surprise ready charged for the young husband. She had Lucy in her own house waiting for him. Every day she expected him to call and be overcome by the rapturous surprise, and every day, knowing his habit of frequenting the park, she marched Lucy thither, under the plea that Master Richard, whom she had already christened, should have an airing.

The round of the red winter sun was behind the bare Kensington chestnuts, when these two parties met. Happily for Lucy and the hope she bore in her bosom, she was perversely admiring a fair horsewoman galloping by at the moment. Mrs. Berry plucked at her gown once or twice, to prepare her eyes for the shock, but Lucy's head was still half averted, and thinks Mrs. Berry, ''Twon't hurt her if she go into his arms head foremost.' They were close; Mrs. Berry performed the bob preliminary. Richard held her silent with a terrible face; he grasped her arm, and put her behind him. Other people intervened. Lucy saw nothing to account for Berry's excessive flutter.

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Berry threw it on the air and some breakfast bacon, which, she said, she knew in the morning while she ate it, was bad for the bile, and which probably was the cause of her bursting into tears, much to Lucy's astonishment.

'What you ate makes you cry, Mrs. Berry?'

'It's all——' Mrs. Berry pressed at her heart and leaned sideways, 'it's all stomach, my dear. Don't ye mind,' and becoming aware of her unfashionable behaviour, she trailed off to the shelter of the elms.

'You have a singular manner with old ladies,' said Sir Austin to his son, after Berry had been swept aside. 'Scarcely courteous. She behaved like a mad woman, certainly.—Are you ill, my son?'

Richard was death-pale, his strong form smitten through with weakness. The baronet sought Adrian's eye. Adrian had seen Lucy as they passed, and he had a glimpse of Richard's countenance while disposing of Berry. Had Lucy recognized them, he would have gone to her unhesitatingly. As she did not, he thought it well, under the circumstances, to leave matters as they were. He answered the baronet's look with a shrug.

'Are you ill, Richard?' Sir Austin again asked his son.

'Come on, sir! come on!' cried Richard.

His father's further meditations, as they stepped briskly to the Foreys, gave poor Berry a character which one who lectures on matrimony, and has kissed but three men in her life, shrieks to hear the very title of.

'Richard will go to his wife to-morrow,' Sir Austin said to Adrian some time before they went in to dinner.

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Adrian asked him if he had chanced to see a young fair-haired lady by the side of the old one Richard had treated so peculiarly; and to the baronet's acknowledgment that he remembered to have observed such a person, Adrian said: 'That was his wife, sir.'

Sir Austin could now dissect the living subject. As if a bullet had torn open the young man's skull, and some blast of battle laid his palpitating organization bare, he watched every motion of his brain and his heart; and with the grief and terror of one whose mental habit was ever to pierce to extremes. Not altogether conscious that he had hitherto played with life, he felt that he was suddenly plunged into the stormful reality of it. He projected to speak plainly to his son on all points that night.

'Richard is very gay,' Mrs. Doria whispered her brother.

'All will be right with him to-morrow,' he replied; for the game had been in his hands so long, so long had he been the God of the machine, that having once resolved to speak plainly and to act, he was to a certain extent secure, bad as the thing to mend might be.

'I notice he has a rather wild laugh—I don't exactly like his eyes,' said Mrs. Doria.

'You will see a change in him to-morrow,' the man of science remarked.

It was reserved for Mrs. Doria herself to experience that change. In the middle of the dinner a telegraphic message from her son-in-law, worthy John Todhunter, reached the house, stating that Clare was alarmingly ill, bidding her come instantly. She cast about for some one to accompany her, and fixed on Richard.

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Before he would give his consent for Richard to go, Sir Austin desired to speak with him apart, and in that interview he said to his son: 'My dear Richard! it was my intention that we should come to an understanding together this night. But the time is short —poor Helen cannot spare many minutes. Let me then say that you deceived me, and that I forgive you. We fix our seal on the past. You will bring your wife to me when you return.' And very cheerfully the baronet looked down on the generous future he thus founded.

'Will you have her at Raynham at once, sir?' said Richard.

'Yes, my son, when you bring her.'

'Are you mocking me, sir?'

'Pray, what do you mean?'

'I ask you to receive her at once.'

'Well! the delay cannot be long. I do not apprehend that you will be kept from your happiness many days.'

'I think it will be some time, sir!' said Richard, sighing deeply.

'And what mental freak is this that can induce you to postpone it and play with your first duty?'

'What is my first duty, sir?'

'Since you are married, to be with your wife.'

'I have heard that from an old woman called Berry!' said Richard to himself, not intending irony.

'Will you receive her at once?' he asked resolutely.

The baronet was clouded by his son's reception of his graciousness. His grateful prospect had formerly been Richard's marriage — the culmination of his System. Richard had destroyed his participation in

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that. He now looked for a pretty scene in recompense:—Richard leading up his wife to him, and both being welcomed by him paternally, and so held one ostentatious minute in his embrace.

He said: 'Before you return, I demur to receiving her.'

'Very well, sir,' replied his son, and stood as if he had spoken all.

'Really you tempt me to fancy you already regret your rash proceeding!' the baronet exclaimed; and the next moment it pained him he had uttered the words, Richard's eyes were so sorrowfully fierce. It pained him, but he divined in that look a history, and he could not refrain from glancing acutely and asking: 'Do you?'

'Regret it, sir?' The question aroused one of those struggles in the young man's breast which a passionate storm of tears may still, and which sink like leaden death into the soul when tears come not. Richard's eyes had the light of the desert.

'Do you?' his father repeated. 'You tempt me—I almost fear you do.' At the thought—for he expressed his mind—the pity that he had for Richard was not pure gold.

'Ask me what I think of her, sir! Ask me what she is! Ask me what it is to have taken one of God's precious angels and chained her to misery! Ask me what it is to have plunged a sword into her heart, and to stand over her and see such a creature bleeding! Do I regret that? Why, yes, I do! Would you?'

His eyes flew hard at his father under the ridge of his eyebrows.

Sir Austin winced and reddened. Did he understand?

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CHAPTER XL Clare's Diary

There is ever in the mind's eye a certain wilfulness. We see and understand; we see and won't understand.

'Tell me why you passed by her as you did this afternoon,' he said gravely: and in the same voice Richard answered: 'I passed her because I could not do otherwise.'

'Your wife, Richard?'

'Yes! my wife!'

'If she had seen you, Richard?'

'God spared her that!'

Mrs. Doria, bustling in practical haste, and bearing Richard's hat and greatcoat in her energetic hands, came between them at this juncture. Dimples of commiseration were in her cheeks while she kissed her brother's perplexed forehead. She forgot her trouble about Clare, deploring his fatuity.

Sir Austin was forced to let his son depart. As of old, he took counsel with Adrian, and the wise youth was soothing. 'Somebody has kissed him, sir, and the chaste boy can't get over it.' This absurd suggestion did more to appease the baronet than if Adrian had given a veritable reasonable key to Richard's conduct. It set him thinking that it might be a prudish strain in the young man's mind, due to the System in difficulties.

'I may have been wrong in one thing,' he said, with an air of the utmost doubt of it. 'I, perhaps, was wrong in allowing him so much liberty during his probation.'

Adrian pointed out to him that he had distinctly commanded it.

'Yes, yes; that is on me.'

His was an order of mind that would accept the

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most burdensome charges, and by some species of moral usury make a profit out of them.

Clare was little talked of. Adrian attributed the employment of the telegraph to John Todhunter's uxorious distress at a toothache, or possibly the first symptoms of an heir to his house.

'That child's mind has disease in it. She is not sound,' said the baronet.

On the door-step of the hotel, when they returned, stood Mrs. Berry. Her wish to speak a few words with the baronet reverentially communicated, she was ushered upstairs into his room.

Mrs. Berry compressed her person in the chair she was beckoned to occupy.

'Well, ma'am, you have something to say,' observed the baronet, for she seemed loth to commence.

'Wishin' I hadn't': Mrs. Berry took him up, and mindful of the good rule to begin at the beginning, pursued: 'I dare say, Sir Austin, you don't remember me, and I little thought when last we parted our meeting 'd be like this. Twenty year don't go over one without showin' it, no more than twenty ox. It's a might o' time,—twenty year! Leastways not quite twenty, it ain't.'

'Round figures are best,' Adrian remarked.

'In them round figures a be-loved son have growed up, and got himself married!' said Mrs. Berry, diving straight into the case.

Sir Austin then learnt that he had before him the culprit who had assisted his son in that venture. It was a stretch of his patience to hear himself addressed on a family matter, but he was naturally courteous.

'He came to my house, Sir Austin, a stranger! If

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twenty years alters us as have knowed each other on the earth, how must they alter they that we parted with just come from heaven! And a heavenly babe he were! se sweet! se strong! *so* fat!'

Adrian laughed aloud.

Mrs. Berry bumped a curtsey to him in her chair, continuing: 'I wished afore I spoke to say how thankful am I bound to be for my pension not cut short, as have offended so, but that I know Sir Austin Feverel, Raynham Abbey, ain't one o' them that likes to hear their good deeds pumlished. And a pension to me now, it's something more than it were. For a pension and pretty rosy cheeks in a maid, which I was—that's a bait many a man'll bite, that won't so a forsaken wife!'

'If you will speak to the point, ma'am, I will listen to you,' the baronet interrupted her.

'It's the beginnin' that's the worst, and that's over, thank the Lord! So I'll speak, Sir Austin, and say my say:—Lord speed me! Believin' our idees o' matrimony to be sim'lar, then, I'll say, once married —married for life! Yes! I don't even like widows. For I can't stop at the grave. Not at the tomb I can't stop. My husband's my husband, and if I'm a body at the Resurrection, I say, speaking humbly, my Berry is the husband o' my body; and to think of two claimin' of me then—it makes me hot all over. Such is my notion of that state 'tween man and woman. No givin' in marriage, o' course I know, and if so I'm single.'

The baronet suppressed a smile. 'Really, my good woman, you wander very much.'

'Beggin' pardon, Sir Austin; but I has my point

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before me all the same, and I 'm comin' to it. Ac-knowledgin' our error, it 's done, and bein' done, it 's writ aloft. Oh! if you ony knew what a sweet young creature she be! Indeed 'taint all of humble birth that 's unworthy, Sir Austin. And she got her idees, too. She reads History! She talk that sensible as would surprise ye. But for all that she 's a prey to the artful o' men—unpertected. And it 's a young marriage —but there 's no fear for her, as far as she go. The fear 's t' other way. There 's that in a man—at the commencement—which make of him Lord knows what! if you any way interferes: whereas a woman bides quiet. It 's consolation catch her, which is what we mean by seducin'. Whereas a man—he 's a savage!'

Sir Austin turned his face to Adrian, who was listening with huge delight.

'Well ma'am, I see you have something in your mind, if you would only come to it quickly.'

'Then here 's my point, Sir Austin. I say you bred him so as there ain't another young gentleman like him in England, and proud he make me. And as for her, I 'll risk sayin'—it 's done, and no harm—you might search England through, and nowhere will ye find a maid that 's his match like his own wife. Then there they be. Are they together as should be? O Lord no! Months they been divided. Then she all lonely and exposed, I went, and fetched her out of seducers' ways—which they may say what they like, but the inn'cent is most open to when they 're healthy and confidin'—I fetch her, and—the liberty—boxed her safe in my own house. So much for that sweet! That you may do with women. But it 's him—Mr. Richard

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—I *am* bold, I know, but there—I'm in for it, and the Lord 'll help me! It's him, Sir Austin, in this great metropolis, warm from a young marriage. It's him, and—I say nothin' of her, and how sweet she bears it, and it's eating her at a time when Natur' should have no other trouble but the one that's goin' on—it's him, and I ask—so bold—shall there—and a Christian gentleman his father—shall there be a tug 'tween him as a son and him as a husband—soon to be somethin' else? I speak bold out—I'd have sons obey ther fathers, but the priest's words spoke over him, which they're now in my ears, I say I ain't a doubt on earth—I'm sure there ain't one in heaven—which dooty's the holier of the two.'

Sir Austin heard her to an end. Their views on the junction of the sexes were undoubtedly akin. To be lectured on his prime subject, however, was slightly disagreeable, and to be obliged mentally to assent to this old lady's doctrine was rather humiliating, when it could not be averred that he had latterly followed it out. He sat cross-legged and silent, a finger to his temple.

'One gets so addle-pated thinkin' many things,' said Mrs. Berry simply. 'That's why we see wonder clever people goin' wrong—to my mind. I think it's al'ays the plan in a dielemmer to pray God and walk forward.'

The keen-witted soft woman was tracking the baronet's thoughts, and she had absolutely run him down and taken an explanation out of his mouth, by which Mrs. Berry was to have been informed that he had acted from a principle of his own, and devolved a wisdom she could not be expected to comprehend.

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Of course he became advised immediately that it would be waste of time to direct such an explanation to her inferior capacity.

He gave her his hand, saying, 'My son has gone out of town to see his cousin, who is ill. He will return in two or three days, and then they will both come to me at Raynham.'

Mrs. Berry took the tips of his fingers, and went half-way to the floor perpendicularly. 'He pass her like a stranger in the park this evenin',' she faltered.

'Ah?' said the baronet. 'Yes, well! they will be at Raynham before the week is over.'

Mrs. Berry was not quite satisfied. 'Not of his own accord he pass that sweet young wife of his like a stranger this day, Sir Austin!'

'I must beg you not to intrude further, ma'am.'

Mrs. Berry bobbed her bunch of a body out of the room.

'All 's well as ends well,' she said to herself. 'It 's bad inquirin' too close among men. We must take 'em something like Providence—*as* they come. Thank heaven! I kep' back the baby.'

In Mrs. Berry's eyes the baby was the victorious reserve.

Adrian asked his chief what he thought of that specimen of woman.

'I think I have not met a better in my life,' said the baronet, mingling praise and sarcasm.

Clare lies in her bed as placid as in the days when she breathed; her white hands stretched their length along the sheets, at peace from head to feet. She needs iron no more. Richard is face to face with

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death for the first time. He sees the sculpture of clay —the spark gone.

Clare gave her mother the welcome of the dead. This child would have spoken nothing but kind commonplaces had she been alive. She was dead, and none knew her malady. On her fourth finger were two wedding-rings.

When hours of weeping had silenced the mother's anguish, she, for some comfort she saw in it, pointed out that strange thing to Richard, speaking low in the chamber of the dead; and then he learnt that it was his own lost ring Clare wore in the two worlds. He learnt from her husband that Clare's last request had been that neither of the rings should be removed. She had written it; she would not speak it.

'I beg of my husband, and all kind people who may have the care of me between this and the grave, to bury me with my hands untouched.'

The tracing of the words showed the bodily torment she was suffering, as she wrote them on a scrap of paper found beside her pillow.

In wonder, as the dim idea grew from the waving of Clare's dead hand, Richard paced the house, and hung about the awful room; dreading to enter it, reluctant to quit it. The secret Clare had buried while she lived, arose with her death. He saw it play like flame across her marble features. The memory of her voice was like a knife at his nerves. His coldness to her started up accusingly: her meekness was bitter blame.

On the evening of the fourth day, her mother came to him in his bedroom, with a face so white that he asked himself if aught worse could happen to a mother

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than the loss of her child. Choking she said to him, 'Read this,' and thrust a leather-bound pocket-book trembling in his hand. She would not breathe to him what it was. She entreated him not to open it before her.

'Tell me,' she said, 'tell me what you think. John must not hear of it. I have nobody to consult but you—O Richard!'

'My Diary' was written in the round hand of Clare's childhood on the first page. The first name his eye encountered was his own.

'Richard's fourteenth birthday. I have worked him a purse and put it under his pillow, because he is going to have plenty of money. He does not notice me now because he has a friend now, and he is ugly, but Richard is not, and never will be.'

The occurrences of that day were subsequently recorded, and a childish prayer to God for him set down. Step by step he saw her growing mind in his history. As she advanced in years she began to look back, and made much of little trivial remembrances, all bearing upon him.

'We went into the fields and gathered cowslips together, and pelted each other, and I told him he used to call them "coals-sleeps" when he was a baby, and he was angry at my telling him, for he does not like to be told he was ever a baby.'

He remembered the incident, and remembered his stupid scorn of her meek affection. Little Clare! how she lived before him in her white dress and pink ribbons, and soft dark eyes! Upstairs she was lying dead. He read on:

'Mama says there is no one in the world like Richard,

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and I am sure there is not, not in the whole world. He says he is going to be a great General and going to the wars. If he does I shall dress myself as a boy and go after him, and he will not know me till I am wounded. Oh I pray he will never, never be wounded. I wonder what I should feel if Richard was ever to die.'

Upstairs Clare was lying dead.

'Lady Blandish said there was a likeness between Richard and me. Richard said I hope I do not hang down my head as she does. He is angry with me because I do not look people in the face and speak out, but I know I am not looking after earth-worms.'

Yes. He had told her that. A shiver seized him at the recollection.

Then it came to a period when the words: 'Richard kissed me,' stood by themselves, and marked a day in her life.

Afterwards it was solemnly discovered that Richard wrote poetry. He read one of his old forgotten compositions penned when he had that ambition.

'Thy truth to me is truer
Than horse, or dog, or blade;
Thy vows to me are fewer
Than ever maiden made.

Thou steppest from thy splendour
To make my life a song:
My bosom shall be tender
As thine has risen strong.'

All the verses were transcribed. 'It is he who is the humble knight,' Clare explained at the close, 'and his lady is a Queen. Any Queen would throw her crown away for him.'

It came to that period when Clare left Raynham with her mother.

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'Richard was not sorry to lose me. He only loves boys and men. Something tells me I shall never see Raynham again. He was dressed in blue. He said Good-bye, Clare, and kissed me on the cheek. Richard never kisses me on the mouth. He did not know I went to his bed and kissed him while he was asleep. He sleeps with one arm under his head, and the other out on the bed. I moved away a bit of his hair that was over his eyes. I wanted to cut it. I have one piece. I do not let anybody see I am unhappy, not even mama. She says I want iron. I am sure I do not. I like to write my name. Clare Doria Forey. Richard's is Richard Doria Feverel.'

His breast rose convulsively. Clare Doria Forey! He knew the music of that name. He had heard it somewhere. It sounded faint and mellow now behind the hills of death.

He could not read for tears. It was midnight. The hour seemed to belong to her. The awful stillness and the darkness were Clare's. Clare's voice clear and cold from the grave possessed it.

Painfully, with blinded eyes, he looked over the breathless pages. She spoke of his marriage, and her finding the ring.

'I knew it was his. I knew he was going to be married that morning. I saw him stand by the altar when they laughed at breakfast. His wife must be so beautiful! Richard's wife! Perhaps he will love me better now he is married. Mama says they must be separated. That is shameful. If I can help him I will. I pray so that he may be happy. I hope God hears poor sinners' prayers. I am very sinful. Nobody knows it as I do. They say I am good, but I know.

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When I look on the ground I am not looking after earth-worms, as he said. Oh, do forgive me, God!'

Then she spoke of her own marriage, and that it was her duty to obey her mother. A blank in the Diary ensued.

'I have seen Richard. Richard despises me,' was the next entry.

But now as he read his eyes were fixed, and the delicate feminine handwriting like a black thread drew on his soul to one terrible conclusion.

'I cannot live. Richard despises me. I cannot bear the touch of my fingers or the sight of my face. Oh! I understand him now. He should not have kissed me so that last time. I wished to die while his mouth was on mine.'

Further: 'I have no escape. Richard said he would die rather than endure it. I know he would. Why should I be afraid to do what he would do? I think if my husband whipped me I could bear it better. He is so kind, and tries to make me cheerful. He will soon be very unhappy. I pray to God half the night. I seem to be losing sight of my God the more I pray.'

Richard laid the book open on the table. Phantom surges seemed to be mounting and travelling for his brain. Had Clare taken his wild words in earnest? Did she lie there dead—he shrouded the thought.

He wrapped the thoughts in shrouds, but he was again reading.

'A quarter to one o'clock. I shall not be alive this time to-morrow. I shall never see Richard now. I dreamed last night we were in the fields together, and he walked with his arm round my waist. We were children, but I thought we were married, and I showed

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him I wore his ring, and he said—if you always wear it, Clare, you are as good as my wife. Then I made a vow to wear it for ever and ever. . . . It is not mama's fault. She does not think as Richard and I do of these things. He is not a coward, nor am I. He hates cowards.

'I have written to his father to make him happy. Perhaps when I am dead he will hear what I say.

'I heard just now Richard call distinctly—Clari, come out to me. Surely he has not gone. I am going I know not where. I cannot think. I am very cold.'

The words were written larger, and staggered towards the close, as if her hand had lost mastery over the pen.

'I can only remember Richard now a boy. A little boy and a big boy. I am not sure now of his voice. I can only remember certain words. "Clari" and "Don Ricardo," and his laugh. He used to be full of fun. Once we laughed all day together tumbling in the hay. Then he had a friend, and began to write poetry, and be proud. If I had married a young man he would have forgiven me, but I should not have been happier. I must have died. God never looks on me.

'It is past two o'clock. The sheep are bleating outside. It must be very cold in the ground. Good-bye, Richard.'

With his name it began and ended. Even to herself Clare was not over-communicative. The book was slender, yet her nineteen years of existence left half the number of pages white.

Those last words drew him irresistibly to gaze on her. There she lay, the same impassive Clare. For

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a moment he wondered she had not moved—to him she had become so different. She who had just filled his ears with strange tidings—it was not possible to think her dead! She seemed to have been speaking to him all through his life. His image was on that still heart.

He dismissed the night-watchers from the room, and remained with her alone, till the sense of death oppressed him, and then the shock sent him to the window to look for sky and stars. Behind a low broad pine, hung with frosty mist, he heard a bell-wether of the flock in the silent fold. Death in life it sounded.

The mother found him praying at the foot of Clare's bed. She knelt by his side, and they prayed, and their joint sobs shook their bodies, but neither of them shed many tears. They held a dark unspoken secret in common. They prayed God to forgive her.

Clare was buried in the family vault of the Tod-hunters. Her mother breathed no wish to have her lying at Lobourne.

After the funeral, what they alone upon earth knew brought them together.

'Richard,' she said, 'the worst is over for me. I have no one to love but you, dear. We have all been fighting against God, and this . . . Richard! you will come with me, and be united to your wife, and spare my brother what I suffer.'

He answered the broken spirit: 'I have killed one. She sees me as I am. I cannot go with you to my wife, because I am not worthy to touch her hand, and were I to go, I should do *this* to silence my self-contempt. Go you to her, and when she asks of me, say

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I have a death upon my head that——No! say that I am abroad, seeking for that which shall cleanse me. If I find it I shall come to claim her. If not, God help us all!'

She had no strength to contest his solemn words, or stay him, and he went forth.

CHAPTER XLI

Austin returns

A man with a beard saluted the wise youth Adrian in the full blaze of Piccadilly with a clap on the shoulder. Adrian glanced leisurely behind.

'Do you want to try my nerves, my dear fellow? I'm not a man of fashion, happily, or you would have struck the seat of them. How are you?'

That was his welcome to Austin Wentworth after his long absence.

Austin took his arm, and asked for news, with the hunger of one who had been in the wilderness five years.

'The Whigs have given up the ghost, my dear Austin. The free Briton is to receive Liberty's pearl, the Ballot. The Aristocracy has had a cycle's notice to quit. The Monarchy and old Madeira are going out; Demos and Cape wines are coming in. They call it Reform. So, you see, your absence has worked wonders. Depart for another five years, and you will return to ruined stomachs, cracked sconces, general upset, an equality made perfect by universal prostration.'

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CHAPTER XLI
Austin returns

Austin indulged him in a laugh. 'I want to hear about ourselves. How is old Ricky?'

'You know of his—what do they call it when greenhorns are licensed to jump into the milkpails of dairymaids?—a very charming little woman she makes, by the way—presentable! quite old Anacreon's rose in milk. Well! everybody thought the System must die of it. Not a bit. It continued to flourish in spite. It's in a consumption now, though—emaciated, lean, raw, spectral! I've this morning escaped from Raynham to avoid the sight of it. I have brought our genial uncle Hippias to town—a delightful companion! I said to him: "We've had a fine Spring." "Ugh!" he answers, "there's a time when you come to think the Spring old." You should have heard how he trained out the "old." I felt something like decay in my sap just to hear him. In the prize-fight of life, my dear Austin, our uncle Hippias has been unfairly hit below the belt. Let's guard ourselves there, and go and order dinner.'

'But where's Ricky now, and what is he doing?' said Austin.

'Ask what he has done. The miraculous boy has gone and got a baby!'

'A child? Richard has one?' Austin's clear eyes shone with pleasure.

'I suppose it's not common among your tropical savages. He has one: one as big as two. That has been the death-blow to the System. It bore the marriage—the baby was too much for it. Could it swallow the baby, 't would live. She, the wonderful woman, has produced a large boy. I assure you it's quite amusing to see the System opening its mouth every

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hour of the day, trying to gulp him down, aware that it would be a consummate cure, or a happy release.'

By degrees Austin learnt the baronet's proceedings, and smiled sadly.

'How has Ricky turned out?' he asked. 'What sort of a character has he?'

'The poor boy is ruined by his excessive anxiety about it. Character? he has the character of a bullet with a treble charge of powder behind it. Enthusiasm is the powder. That boy could get up an enthusiasm for the maiden days of Ops! He was going to reform the world, after your fashion, Austin,—you have something to answer for. Unfortunately he began with the feminine side of it. Cupid proud of Phœbus newly slain, or Pluto wishing to people his kingdom, if you like, put it into the soft head of one of the guileless grateful creatures to kiss him for his good work. Oh, horror! he never expected that. Conceive the System in the flesh, and you have our Richard. The consequence is, that this male Peri refuses to enter his Paradise, though the gates are open for him, the trumpets blow, and the fair unspotted one awaits him fruitful within. We heard of him last that he was trying the German waters—preparatory to his undertaking the release of Italy from the subjugation of the Teuton. Let's hope they'll wash him. He is in the company of Lady Judith Felle—your old friend, the ardent female Radical who married the decrepit lord to carry out her principles. They always marry English lords, or foreign princes. I admire their tactics.'

'Judith is bad for him in such a state. I like her, but she was always too sentimental,' said Austin.

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CHAPTER XLI
Austin returns

'Sentiment made her marry the old lord, I suppose? I like her *for* her sentiment, Austin. Sentimental people are sure to live long and die fat. Feeling, that's the slayer, coz. Sentiment! 'tis the cajolery of existence: the soft bloom which whoso weareth, he or she is enviable. Would that I had more!'

'You're not much changed, Adrian.'

'I'm not a Radical, Austin.'

Further inquiries, responded to in Adrian's figurative speech, instructed Austin that the baronet was waiting for his son, in a posture of statuesque offended paternity, before he would receive his daughter-in-law and grandson. That was what Adrian meant by the efforts of the System to swallow the baby.

'We're in a tangle,' said the wise youth. 'Time will extricate us, I presume, or what is the venerable signor good for?'

Austin mused some minutes, and asked for Lucy's place of residence.

'We'll go to her by and by,' said Adrian.

'I shall go and see her now,' said Austin.

'Well, we'll go and order the dinner first, coz.'

'Give me her address.'

'Really, Austin, you carry matters with too long a beard,' Adrian objected. 'Don't you care what you eat?' he roared hoarsely, looking humorously hurt. 'I dare say not. A slice out of him that's handy—sauce du ciel! Go, batten on the baby, cannibal. Dinner at seven.'

Adrian gave him his own address, and Lucy's, and strolled off to do the better thing.

Overnight Mrs. Berry had observed a long stranger in her tea-cup. Posting him on her fingers and start-

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ing him with a smack, he had vaulted lightly and thereby indicated that he was positively coming the next day. She forgot him in the bustle of her duties and the absorption of her faculties in thoughts of the incomparable stranger Lucy had presented to the world, till a knock at the street-door reminded her. 'There he is!' she cried, as she ran to open to him. 'There's my stranger come!' Never was a woman's faith in omens so justified. The stranger desired to see Mrs. Richard Feverel. He said his name was Mr. Austin Wentworth. Mrs. Berry clasped her hands, exclaiming, 'Come at last!' and ran bolt out of the house to look up and down the street. Presently she returned with many excuses for her rudeness, saying: 'I expected to see her comin' home, Mr. Wentworth. Every day twice a day she go out to give her blessed angel an airing. No leavin' the child with nursemaids for her! She *is* a mother! and good milk, too, thank the Lord! though her heart's se low.'

Indoors Mrs. Berry stated who she was, related the history of the young couple, and her participation in it, and admired the beard. 'Though I'd swear you don't wear it for ornament, now!' she said, having in the first impulse designed a stroke at man's vanity.

Ultimately Mrs. Berry spoke of the family complication, and with dejected head and joined hands threw out dark hints about Richard.

While Austin was giving his cheerfuller views of the case, Lucy came in, preceding the baby.

'I am Austin Wentworth,' he said, taking her hand. They read each other's faces, these two, and smiled kinship.

'Your name is Lucy?'

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CHAPTER XLI
Austin returns

She affirmed it softly.

'And mine is Austin, as you know.'

Mrs. Berry allowed time for Lucy's charms to subdue him, and presented Richard's representative, who, seeing a new face, suffered himself to be contemplated before he commenced crying aloud and knocking at the doors of Nature for something that was due to him.

'Ain't he a lusty darlin'?' says Mrs. Berry. 'Ain't he like his own father? There can't be no doubt about zoo, zoo pitty pet. Look at his fists. Ain't he got passion? Ain't he a splendid roarer? Oh!' and she went off rapturously into baby-language.

A fine boy, certainly. Mrs. Berry exhibited his legs for further proof, desiring Austin's confirmation as to their being dumplings.

Lucy murmured a word of excuse, and bore the splendid roarer out of the room.

'She might 'a done it here,' said Mrs. Berry. 'There 's no prettier sight, I say. If her dear husband could but see that! He 's off in his heroics—he want to be doin' all sorts o' things: I say he 'll never do anything grander than that baby. You should 'a seen her uncle over that baby—he came here, for I said, you *shall* see your own fam'ly, my dear, and so she thinks. He come, and he laughed over that baby in the joy of his heart, poor man! he cried, he did. You should see that Mr. Thompson, Mr. Wentworth—a friend o' Mr. Richard's, and a very modest-minded young gentleman—he worships her in his innocence. It 's a sight to see him with that baby. My belief is he 's unhappy 'cause he can't anyways be nursemaid to him. O Mr. Wentworth! what *do* you think of her, sir?'

Austin's reply was as satisfactory as a man's poor

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speech could make it. He heard that Lady Feverel was in the house, and Mrs. Berry prepared the way for him to pay his respects to her. Then Mrs. Berry ran to Lucy, and the house buzzed with new life. The simple creatures felt in Austin's presence something good among them. 'He don't speak much,' said Mrs. Berry, 'but I see by his eye he mean a deal. He ain't one o' yer long-word gentry, who 's all gay deceivers, every one of 'em.'

Lucy pressed the hearty suckling into her breast. 'I wonder what he thinks of me, Mrs. Berry? I could not speak to him. I loved him before I saw him. I knew what his face was like.'

'He looks proper even with a beard, and that's a trial for a virtuous man,' said Mrs. Berry. 'One sees straight *through* the hair with him. Think! he'll think what any *man*'d think—you a-suckin' spite o' all your sorrow, my sweet,—and my Berry talkin' of his Roman matrons!—here's an English wife 'll match 'em all! that's what he thinks. And now that leetle dark under yer eye 'll clear, my darlin', now he've come.'

Mrs. Berry looked to no more than that; Lucy to no more than the peace she had in being near Richard's best friend. When she sat down to tea it was with a sense that the little room that held her was her home perhaps for many a day.

A chop procured and cooked by Mrs. Berry formed Austin's dinner. During the meal he entertained them with anecdotes of his travels. Poor Lucy had no temptation to try to conquer Austin. That heroic weakness of hers was gone.

Mrs. Berry had said: 'Three cups—I goes no further,'

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CHAPTER XLI
Austin returns

and Lucy had rejected the proffer of more tea, when Austin, who was in the thick of a Brazilian forest, asked her if she was a good traveller.

'I mean, can you start at a minute's notice?'

Lucy hesitated, and then said, 'Yes,' decisively, to which Mrs. Berry added, that she was not a 'luggage-woman.'

'There used to be a train at seven o'clock,' Austin remarked, consulting his watch.

The two women were silent.

'Could you get ready to come with me to Raynham in ten minutes?'

Austin looked as if he had asked a commonplace question.

Lucy's lips parted to speak. She could not answer.

Loud rattled the teaboard to Mrs. Berry's dropping hands.

'Joy and deliverance!' she exclaimed with a foundering voice.

'Will you come?' Austin kindly asked again.

Lucy tried to stop her beating heart, as she answered, 'Yes.' Mrs. Berry cunningly pretended to interpret the irresolution in her tones with a mighty whisper: 'She 's thinking what 's to be done with baby.'

'He must learn to travel,' said Austin.

'Oh!' cried Mrs. Berry, 'and I'll be his nuss, and bear him, a sweet! Oh! and think of it! me nurse-maid once more at Raynham Abbey! but it 's nurse-woman now, you must say. Let us be goin' on the spot.'

She started up and away in hot haste, fearing delay would cool the heaven-sent resolve. Austin smiled, eyeing his watch and Lucy alternately. She was wishing

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to ask a multitude of questions. His face reassured her, and saying: 'I will be dressed instantly,' she also left the room. Talking, bustling, preparing, wrapping up my lord, and looking to their neatnesses, they were nevertheless ready within the time prescribed by Austin, and Mrs. Berry stood humming over the baby. 'He 'll sleep it through,' she said. 'He 's had enough for an alderman, and goes to sleep sound after his dinner, he do, a duck!' Before they departed, Lucy ran up to Lady Feverel. She returned for the small one.

'One moment, Mr. Wentworth?'

'Just two,' said Austin.

Master Richard was taken up, and when Lucy came back her eyes were full of tears.

'She thinks she is never to see him again, Mr. Wentworth.'

'She shall,' Austin said simply.

Off they went, and with Austin near her, Lucy forgot to dwell at all upon the great act of courage she was performing.

'I do hope baby will not wake,' was her chief solicitude.

'He!' cries nurse-woman Berry from the rear, 'his little tum-tum 's *as* tight *as* he can hold, a pet! a lamb! a bird! a beauty! and ye may take yer oath he never wakes till that's slack. He 've got character of his own, a blessed!'

There are some tremendous citadels that only want to be taken by storm. The baronet sat alone in his library, sick of resistance, and rejoicing in the pride of no surrender; a terror to his friends and to himself. Hearing Austin's name sonorously pronounced by the

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CHAPTER XLI
Austin returns

man of calves, he looked up from his book, and held out his hand. 'Glad to see you, Austin.' His appearance betokened complete security. The next minute he found himself escaladed.

It was a cry from Mrs. Berry that told him others were in the room besides Austin. Lucy stood a little behind the lamp: Mrs. Berry close to the door. The door was half open, and passing through it might be seen the petrified figure of a fine man. The baronet glancing over the lamp rose at Mrs. Berry's signification of a woman's personality. Austin stepped back and led Lucy to him by the hand. 'I have brought Richard's wife, sir,' he said with a pleased, perfectly uncalculating, countenance, that was disarming. Very pale and trembling, Lucy bowed. She felt her two hands taken, and heard a kind voice. Could it be possible it belonged to the dreadful father of her husband? She lifted her eyes nervously: her hands were still detained. The baronet contemplated Richard's choice. Had he ever had a rivalry with those pure eyes? He saw the pain of her position shooting across her brows, and, uttering gentle inquiries as to her health, placed her in a seat. Mrs. Berry had already fallen into a chair.

'What aspect do you like for your bedroom?—East?' said the baronet.

Lucy was asking herself wonderingly: 'Am I to stay?'

'Perhaps you had better take to Richard's room at once,' he pursued. 'You have the Lobourne valley there and a good morning air, and will feel more at home.'

Lucy's colour mounted. Mrs. Berry gave a short

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cough, as one who should say, 'The day is ours!' Undoubtedly — strange as it was to think it — the fortress was carried.

'Lucy is rather tired,' said Austin, and to hear her Christian name thus bravely spoken brought grateful dew to her eyes.

The baronet was about to touch the bell. 'But have you come alone?' he asked.

At this Mrs. Berry came forward. Not immediately: it seemed to require effort for her to move, and when she was within the region of the lamp, her agitation could not escape notice. The blissful bundle shook in her arms.

'By the way, what is he to me?' Austin inquired generally as he went and unveiled the younger hope of Raynham. 'My relationship is not so defined as yours, sir.'

An observer might have supposed that the baronet peeped at his grandson with the courteous indifference of one who merely wished to compliment the mother of anybody's child.

'I really think he's like Richard,' Austin laughed. Lucy looked: I am sure he is!

'As like as one to one,' Mrs. Berry murmured feebly; but Grandpapa not speaking she thought it incumbent on her to pluck up. 'And he's as healthy as his father was, Sir Austin—spite o' the might 'a beens. Reg'lar as the clock! We never want a clock since he come. We knows the hour o' the day, and *of* the night.'

'You nurse him yourself, of course?' the baronet spoke to Lucy, and was satisfied on that point.

Mrs. Berry was going to display his prodigious legs.

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Austin returns

Lucy, fearing the consequent effect on the prodigious lungs, begged her not to wake him. ''T'd take a deal to do that,' said Mrs. Berry, and harped on Master Richard's health and the small wonder it was that he enjoyed it, considering the superior quality of his diet, and the lavish attentions of his mother, and then suddenly fell silent on a deep sigh.

'He looks healthy,' said the baronet, 'but I am not a judge of babies.'

Thus, having capitulated, Raynham chose to acknowledge its new commandant, who was now borne away, under the directions of the housekeeper, to occupy the room Richard had slept in when an infant.

Austin cast no thought on his success. The baronet said: 'She is extremely well-looking.' He replied: 'A person you take to at once.' There it ended.

But a much more animated colloquy was taking place aloft, where Lucy and Mrs. Berry sat alone. Lucy expected her to talk about the reception they had met with, and the house, and the peculiarities of the rooms, and the solid happiness that seemed in store. Mrs. Berry all the while would persist in consulting the looking-glass. Her first distinct answer was, 'My dear! tell me candid, how do I look?'

'Very nice indeed, Mrs. Berry; but could you have believed he would be so kind, so considerate?'

'I'm sure I looked a frump,' returned Mrs. Berry. 'Oh, dear! two birds at a shot. What *do* you think, now?'

'I never saw so wonderful a likeness,' says Lucy.

'Likeness! look at me.' Mrs. Berry was trembling and hot in the palms.

'You're very feverish, dear Berry. What can it be?'

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'Ain't it like the love-flutters of a young gal, my dear.'

'Go to bed, Berry dear,' says Lucy, pouting in her soft caressing way. 'I will undress you, and see to you, dear heart! You've had so much excitement.'

'Ha! ha!' Berry laughed hysterically; 'she thinks it's about this business of hers. Why, it's child's-play, my darlin'. But I didn't look for tragedy to-night. Sleep in this house I can't, my love!'

Lucy was astonished. 'Not sleep here, Mrs. Berry? —Oh! why, you silly old thing? I know.'

'Do ye!' said Mrs. Berry with a sceptical nose.

'You're afraid of ghosts.'

'Belike I am when they're six foot two in their shoes, and bellows when you stick a pin into their calves. I seen my Berry!'

'Your husband?'

'Large as life!'

Lucy meditated on optical delusions, but Mrs. Berry described him as the Colossus who had marched them into the library, and vowed that he had recognized her and quaked. 'Time ain't aged him,' said Mrs. Berry, 'whereas me! he've got his excuse now. I *know* I look a frump.'

Lucy kissed her: 'You look the nicest, dearest old thing.'

'You may say an old thing, my dear.'

'And your husband is really here?'

'Berry's below!'

Profoundly uttered as this was, it chased every vestige of incredulity.

'What will you do, Mrs. Berry?'

'Go, my dear. Leave him to be happy in his own

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CHAPTER XLI
Austin returns

way. It 's over atween us, I see that. When I entered the house I felt there was something comin' over me, and lo and behold ye! no sooner was we in the hall-passage—if it hadn't been for that blessed infant I should 'a dropped. I must 'a known his step, for my heart began thumpin', and I knew I hadn't got my hair straight—that Mr. Wentworth was in such a hurry—nor my best gown. I knew he 'd scorn me. He hates frumps.'

'Scorn you!' cried Lucy angrily. 'He who has behaved so wickedly!'

Mrs. Berry attempted to rise. 'I may as well go at once,' she whimpered. 'If I see him I shall only be disgracin' of myself. I feel it all on my side already. Did ye mark him, my dear? I know I was vexin' to him at times, I was. Those big men are se touchy about their dignity—nat'ral. Hark at me! I 'm goin' all soft in a minute. Let me leave the house, my dear. I dare say it was good half my fault. Young women don't understand men sufficient—not altogether—and I was a young woman then; and then what they goes and does they ain't quite answerable for: they feels, I dare say, pushed from behind. Yes. I 'll go. I 'm a frump. I 'll go. 'Tain't in natur' for me to sleep in the same house.'

Lucy laid her hands on Mrs. Berry's shoulders, and forcibly fixed her in her seat. 'Leave baby, naughty woman? I tell you he shall come to you, and fall on his knees to you and beg your forgiveness.'

'Berry on his knees!'

'Yes. And he shall beg and pray you to forgive him.'

'If you get more from Martin Berry than breath-

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away words, great 'll be my wonder!' said Mrs. Berry.

'We will see,' said Lucy, thoroughly determined to do something for the good creature that had befriended her.

Mrs. Berry examined her gown. 'Won't it seem we're runnin' after him?' she murmured faintly.

'He is your husband, Mrs. Berry. He may be wanting to come to you now.'

'Oh! where is all I was goin' to say to that man when we met!' Mrs. Berry ejaculated. Lucy had left the room.

On the landing outside the door Lucy met a lady dressed in black, who stopped her and asked if she was Richard's wife, and kissed her, passing from her immediately. Lucy despatched a message for Austin, and related the Berry history. Austin sent for the great man, and said: 'Do you know your wife is here?' Before Berry had time to draw himself up to enunciate his longest, he was requested to step upstairs, and as his young mistress at once led the way, Berry could not refuse to put his legs in motion and carry the stately edifice aloft.

Of the interview Mrs. Berry gave Lucy a slight sketch that night. 'He began in the old way, my dear, and says I, a true heart and plain words, Martin Berry. So there he cuts himself and his Johnson short, and down he goes—down *on* his knees. I never could 'a believed it. I kep' my dignity as a woman till I see that sight, but that done for me. I was a ripe apple in his arms 'fore I knew where I was. There's something about a fine man on his knees that's too much for us women. And it reely was the penitent

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on his two knees, not the lover on his one. If he mean it! But ah! what do you think he begs of me, my dear?—not to make it known in the house just yet! I can't, I can't say that look well.'

Lucy attributed it to his sense of shame at his conduct, and Mrs. Berry did her best to look on it in that light.

'Did the bar'net kiss ye when you wished him good night?' she asked. Lucy said he had not. 'Then bide awake as long as ye can,' was Mrs. Berry's rejoinder. 'And now let us pray blessings on that simple-speaking gentleman who does so much 'cause he says se little.'

Like many other natural people, Mrs. Berry was only silly where her own soft heart was concerned. As she secretly anticipated, the baronet came into her room when all was quiet. She saw him go and bend over Richard the Second, and remain earnestly watching him. He then went to the half-opened door of the room where Lucy slept, leaned his ear a moment, knocked gently, and entered. Mrs. Berry heard low words interchanging within. She could not catch a syllable, yet she would have sworn to the context. 'He 've called her his daughter, promised her happiness, and given a father's kiss to her.' When Sir Austin passed out she was in a deep sleep.

CHAPTER XLII

Nature speaks

Briareus reddening angrily over the sea—where is that vaporous Titan? And Hesper set in his rosy garland

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—why looks he so implacably sweet? It is that one has left that bright home to go forth and do cloudy work, and he has got a stain with which he dare not return. Far in the West fair Lucy beckons him to come. Ah, heaven! if he might! How strong and fierce the temptation is! how subtle the sleepless desire! it drugs his reason, his honour. For he loves her; she is still the first and only woman to him. Otherwise would this black spot be hell to him? otherwise would his limbs be chained while her arms are spread open to him. And if he loves her, why then what is one fall in the pit, or a thousand? Is not love the password to that beckoning bliss? So may we say; but here is one whose body has been made a temple to him, and it is desecrated.

A temple, and desecrated! For what is it fit for but for a dance of devils? His education has thus wrought him to think.

He can blame nothing but his own baseness. But to feel base and accept the bliss that beckons—he has not fallen so low as that.

Ah, happy English home! sweet wife! what mad miserable Wisp of the Fancy led him away from you, high in his conceit? Poor wretch! that thought to be he of the hundred hands, and war against the absolute Gods. Jove whispered a light commission to the Laughing Dame; she met him; and how did he shake Olympus? with laughter!

Sure it were better to be Orestes, the Furies howling in his ears, than one called to by a heavenly soul from whom he is for ever outcast. He has not the oblivion of madness. Clothed in the lights of his first passion, robed in the splendour of old skies, she meets him

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Nature speaks

everywhere; morning, evening, night, she shines above him; waylays him suddenly in forest depths; drops palpably on his heart. At moments he forgets; he rushes to embrace her; calls her his beloved, and lo, her innocent kiss brings agony of shame to his face.

Daily the struggle endured. His father wrote to him, begging him by the love he had for him to return. From that hour Richard burnt unread all the letters he received. He knew too well how easily he could persuade himself: words from without might tempt him and quite extinguish the spark of honourable feeling that tortured him, and that he clung to in desperate self-vindication.

To arrest young gentlemen on the downward slope is both a dangerous and thankless office. It is, nevertheless, one that fair women greatly prize, and certain of them professionally follow. Lady Judith, as far as her sex would permit, was also of the Titans in their battle against the absolute Gods; for which purpose, mark you, she had married a lord incapable in all save his acres. Her achievements she kept to her own mind: she did not look happy over them. She met Richard accidentally in Paris; she saw his state; she let him learn that she alone on earth understood him. The consequence was that he was forthwith enrolled in her train. It soothed him to be near a woman. Did she venture her guess as to the cause of his conduct, she blotted it out with a facility women have, and cast on it a melancholy hue he was taught to participate in. She spoke of sorrows, personal sorrows, much as he might speak of his—vaguely, and with self-blame. And she understood him. How the dark unfathomed wealth within us gleams to a

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woman's eye! We are at compound interest immediately: so much richer than we knew!—almost as rich as we dreamed! But then the instant we are away from her we find ourselves bankrupt, beggared. How is that? We do not ask. We hurry to her and bask hungrily in her orbs. The eye must be feminine to be thus creative: I cannot say why. Lady Judith understood Richard, and he feeling infinitely vile, somehow held to her more feverishly, as one who dreaded the worst in missing her. The spirit must rest; he was weak with what he suffered.

Austin found them among the hills of Nassau in Rhineland: Titans, male and female, who had not displaced Jove, and were now adrift, prone on floods of sentiment. The blue-frocked peasant swinging behind his oxen of a morning, the gaily-kerchiefed fruit-woman, the jackass-driver, even the doctor of those regions, have done more for their fellows. Horrible reflection! Lady Judith is serene above it, but it frets at Richard when he is out of her shadow. Often wretchedly he watches the young men of his own age trooping to their work. Not cloud-work theirs! Work solid, unambitious, fruitful!

Lady Judith had a nobler in prospect for the hero. He gaped blindfolded for anything, and she gave him the map of Europe in tatters. He swallowed it comfortably. It was an intoxicating cordial. Himself on horseback over-riding wrecks of Empires! Well might common-sense cower with the meaner animals at the picture. Tacitly they agreed to recast the civilized globe. The quality of vapour is to melt and shape itself anew; but it is never the quality of vapour to reassume the same shapes. Briareus of the hundred

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unoccupied hands may turn to a monstrous donkey with his hind legs aloft, or twenty thousand jabbering apes. The phantasmic groupings of the young brain are very like those we see in the skies, and equally the sport of the wind. Lady Judith blew. There was plenty of vapour in him, and it always resolved into some shape or other. You that mark those clouds of eventide, and know youth, will see the similitude: it will not be strange, it will barely seem foolish to you, that a young man of Richard's age, Richard's education and position, should be in this wild state. Had he not been nursed to believe he was born for great things? Did she not say she was sure of it? And to feel base, yet born for better, is enough to make one grasp at anything cloudy. Suppose the hero with a game leg. How intense is his faith in quacks! with what a passion of longing is he not seized to break somebody's head! They spoke of Italy in low voices. 'The time will come,' said she. 'And I shall be ready,' said he. What rank was he to take in the liberating army? Captain, colonel, general in chief, or simple private? Here, as became him, he was much more positive and specific than she was. Simple private he said. Yet he saw himself caracoling on horseback. Private in the cavalry, then, of course. Private in the cavalry over-riding wrecks of Empires. She looked forth under her brows with mournful indistinctness at that object in the distance. They read Petrarch to get up the necessary fires. Italia mia! Vain indeed was this speaking to those thick and mortal wounds in her fair body, but their sighs went with the Tiber, the Arno, and the Po, and their hands joined. Who has not wept for Italy? I see the aspirations of a

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world arise for her, thick and frequent as the puffs of smoke from cigars of Pannonian sentries!

So when Austin came Richard said he could not leave Lady Judith, Lady Judith said she could not part with him. For his sake, mind! This Richard verified. Perhaps he had reason to be grateful. The high-road of Folly may have led him from one that terminates worse. He is foolish, God knows; but for my part I will not laugh at the hero because he has not got his occasion. Meet him when he is, as it were, anointed by his occasion, and he is no laughing matter.

Richard felt his safety in this which, to please the world, we must term folly. Exhalation of vapours was a wholesome process to him, and somebody who gave them shape and hue a beneficent Iris. He told Austin plainly he could not leave her, and did not anticipate the day when he could.

'Why can't you go to your wife, Richard?'

'For a reason you would be the first to approve, Austin.'

He welcomed Austin with every show of manly tenderness, and sadness at heart. Austin he had always associated with his Lucy in that Hesperian palace of the West. Austin waited patiently. Lady Judith's old lord played on all the baths in Nassau without evoking the tune of health. Whithersoever he listed she changed her abode. So admirable a wife was to be pardoned for espousing an old man. She was an enthusiast even in her connubial duties. She had the brows of an enthusiast. With occasion she might have been a Charlotte Corday. So let her also be shielded from the ban of ridicule. Nonsense of enthusiasts is very different from nonsense of

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ninnies. She was truly a high-minded person, of that order who always do what they see to be right, and always have confidence in their optics. She was not unworthy of a young man's admiration, if she was unfit to be his guide. She resumed her ancient intimacy with Austin easily, while she preserved her new footing with Richard. She and Austin were not unlike, only Austin never dreamed, and had not married an old lord.

The three were walking on the bridge at Limburg on the Lahn, where the shadow of a stone bishop is thrown by the moonlight on the water brawling over slabs of slate. A woman passed them bearing in her arms a baby, whose mighty size drew their attention.

'What a wopper!' Richard laughed.

'Well, that is a fine fellow,' said Austin, 'but I don't think he 's much bigger than your boy.'

'He 'll do for a nineteenth-century Arminius,' Richard was saying. Then he looked at Austin.

'What was that you said?' Lady Judith asked of Austin.

'What have I said that deserves to be repeated?' Austin counterqueried quite innocently.

'Richard has a son?'

'You didn't know it?'

'His modesty goes very far,' said Lady Judith, sweeping the shadow of a curtsey to Richard's paternity.

Richard's heart throbbed with violence. He looked again in Austin's face. Austin took it so much as a matter of course that he said nothing more on the subject.

'Well!' murmured Lady Judith,

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When the two men were alone, Richard said in a quick voice: 'Austin! you were in earnest?'

'You didn't know it, Richard?'

'No.'

'Why, they all wrote to you. Lucy wrote to you: your father, your aunt. I believe Adrian wrote too.'

'I tore up their letters,' said Richard.

'He's a noble fellow, I can tell you. You've nothing to be ashamed of. He'll soon be coming to ask about you. I made sure you knew.'

'No, I never knew.' Richard walked away, and then said: 'What is he like?'

'Well, he really is like you, but he has his mother's eyes.'

'And she's——?'

'Yes. I think the child has kept her well.'

'They're both at Raynham?'

'Both.'

Hence, fantastic vapours! What are ye to this! Where are the dreams of the hero when he learns he has a child? Nature is taking him to her bosom. She will speak presently. Every domesticated boor in these hills can boast the same, yet marvels the hero at none of his visioned prodigies as he does when he comes to hear of this most common performance. A father? Richard fixed his eyes as if he were trying to make out the lineaments of his child.

Telling Austin he would be back in a few minutes, he sallied into the air, and walked on and on. 'A father!' he kept repeating to himself: 'a child!' And though he knew it not, he was striking the key-notes of Nature. But he did know of a singular harmony that suddenly burst over his whole being.

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CHAPTER XLII
Nature speaks

The moon was surpassingly bright: the summer air heavy and still. He left the high road and pierced into the forest. His walk was rapid: the leaves on the trees brushed his cheeks; the dead leaves heaped in the dells noised to his feet. Something of a religious joy —a strange sacred pleasure—was in him. By degrees it wore; he remembered himself: and now he was possessed by a proportionate anguish. A father! he dared never see his child. And he had no longer his phantasies to fall upon. He was utterly bare to his sin. In his troubled mind it seemed to him that Clare looked down on him—Clare who saw him as he was; and that to her eyes it would be infamy for him to go and print his kiss upon his child. Then came stern efforts to command his misery and make the nerves of his face iron.

By the log of an ancient tree half buried in dead leaves of past summers, beside a brook, he halted as one who had reached his journey's end. There he discovered he had a companion in Lady Judith's little dog. He gave the friendly animal a pat of recognition, and both were silent in the forest-silence.

It was impossible for Richard to return; his heart was surcharged. He must advance, and on he footed, the little dog following.

An oppressive slumber hung about the forest-branches. In the dells and on the heights was the same dead heat. Here where the brook tinkled it was no cool-lipped sound, but metallic, and without the spirit of water. Yonder in a space of moonlight on lush grass, the beams were as white fire to sight and feeling. No haze spread around. The valleys were clear, defined to the shadows of their verges; the dis-

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tances sharply distinct, and with the colours of day but slightly softened. Richard beheld a roe moving across a slope of sward far out of rifle-mark. The breathless silence was significant, yet the moon shone in a broad blue heaven. Tongue out of mouth trotted the little dog after him; couched panting when he stopped an instant; rose weariedly when he started afresh. Now and then a large white night-moth flitted through the dusk of the forest.

On a barren corner of the wooded highland looking inland stood gray topless ruins set in nettles and rank grass-blades. Richard mechanically sat down on the crumbling flints to rest, and listened to the panting of the dog. Sprinkled at his feet were emerald lights: hundreds of glow-worms studded the dark dry ground.

He sat and eyed them, thinking not at all. His energies were expended in action. He sat as a part of the ruins, and the moon turned his shadow Westward from the South. Overhead, as she declined, long ripples of silver cloud were imperceptibly stealing toward her. They were the van of a tempest. He did not observe them or the leaves beginning to chatter. When he again pursued his course with his face to the Rhine, a huge mountain appeared to rise sheer over him, and he had it in his mind to scale it. He got no nearer to the base of it for all his vigorous outstepping. The ground began to dip; he lost sight of the sky. Then heavy thunder-drops struck his cheek, the leaves were singing, the earth breathed, it was black before him and behind. All at once the thunder spoke. The mountain he had marked was bursting over him.

Up started the whole forest in violet fire. He saw the country at the foot of the hills to the bounding

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CHAPTER XLII
Nature speaks

Rhine gleam, quiver, extinguished. Then there were pauses; and the lightning seemed as the eye of heaven, and the thunder as the tongue of heaven, each alternately addressing him; filling him with awful rapture. Alone there—sole human creature among the grandeurs and mysteries of storm—he felt the representative of his kind, and his spirit rose, and marched, and exulted, let it be glory, let it be ruin! Lower down the lightened abysses of air rolled the wrathful crash: then white thrusts of light were darted from the sky, and great curving ferns, seen stedfast in pallor a second, were supernaturally agitated, and vanished. Then a shrill song roused in the leaves and the herbage. Prolonged and louder it sounded, as deeper and heavier the deluge pressed. A mighty force of water satisfied the desire of the earth. Even in this, drenched as he was by the first outpouring, Richard had a savage pleasure. Keeping in motion, he was scarcely conscious of the wet, and the grateful breath of the weeds was refreshing. Suddenly he stopped short, lifting a curious nostril. He fancied he smelt meadow-sweet. He had never seen the flower in Rhineland—never thought of it; and it would hardly be met with in a forest. He was sure he smelt it fresh in dews. His little companion wagged a miserable wet tail some way in advance. He went on slowly, thinking indistinctly. After two or three steps he stooped and stretched out his hand to feel for the flower, having, he knew not why, a strong wish to verify its growth there. Groping about, his hand encountered something warm that started at his touch, and he, with the instinct we have, seized it, and lifted it to look at it. The creature was very small, evidently quite young. Richard's eyes,

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now accustomed to the darkness, were able to discern it for what it was, a tiny leveret, and he supposed that the dog had probably frightened its dam just before he found it. He put the little thing on one hand in his breast, and stepped out rapidly as before.

The rain was now steady; from every tree a fountain poured. So cool and easy had his mind become that he was speculating on what kind of shelter the birds could find, and how the butterflies and moths saved their coloured wings from washing. Folded close they might hang under a leaf, he thought. Lovingly he looked into the dripping darkness of the coverts on each side, as one of their children. He was next musing on a strange sensation he experienced. It ran up one arm with an indescribable thrill, but communicated nothing to his heart. It was purely physical, ceased for a time, and recommenced, till he had it all through his blood, wonderfully thrilling. He grew aware that the little thing he carried in his breast was licking his hand there. The small rough tongue going over and over the palm of his hand produced the strange sensation he felt. Now that he knew the cause, the marvel ended; but now that he knew the cause, his heart was touched and made more of it. The gentle scraping continued without intermission as on he walked. What did it say to him? Human tongue could not have said so much just then.

A pale gray light on the skirts of the flying tempest displayed the dawn. Richard was walking hurriedly. The green drenched weeds lay all about in his path, bent thick, and the forest drooped glimmeringly. Impelled as a man who feels a revelation mounting obscurely to his brain, Richard was passing one of

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those little forest-chapels, hung with votive wreaths, where the peasant halts to kneel and pray. Cold, still, in the twilight it stood, rain-drops pattering round it. He looked within, and saw the Virgin holding her Child. He moved by. But not many steps had he gone ere his strength went out of him, and he shuddered. What was it? He asked not. He was in other hands. Vivid as lightning the Spirit of Life illumined him. He felt in his heart the cry of his child, his darling's touch. With shut eyes he saw them both. They drew him from the depths; they led him a blind and tottering man. And as they led him he had a sense of purification so sweet he shuddered again and again.

When he looked out from his trance on the breathing world, the small birds hopped and chirped: warm fresh sunlight was over all the hills. He was on the edge of the forest, entering a plain clothed with ripe corn under a spacious morning sky.

CHAPTER XLIII

Again the Magian Conflict

They heard at Raynham that Richard was coming. Lucy had the news first in a letter from Ripton Thompson, who met him at Bonn. Ripton did not say that he had employed his vacation holiday on purpose to use his efforts to induce his dear friend to return to his wife; and finding Richard already on his way, of course Ripton said nothing to him, but affected to be travelling for his pleasure like any cockney. Richard also wrote to her. In case she

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should have gone to the sea he directed her to send word to his hotel that he might not lose an hour. His letter was sedate in tone, very sweet to her. Assisted by the faithful female Berry, she was conquering an Aphorist.

'Woman's reason is in the milk of her breasts,' was one of his rough notes, due to an observation of Lucy's maternal cares. Let us remember, therefore, we men who have drunk of it largely there, that she has it.

Mrs. Berry zealously apprised him how early Master Richard's education had commenced, and the great future historian he must consequently be. This trait in Lucy was of itself sufficient to win Sir Austin.

'Here my plan with Richard was false,' he reflected: 'in presuming that anything save blind fortuity would bring him such a mate as he should have.' He came to add: 'And has got!'

He could admit now that instinct had so far beaten science; for as Richard was coming, as all were to be happy, his wisdom embraced them all paternally as the author of their happiness. Between him and Lucy a tender intimacy grew.

'I told you she could talk, sir,' said Adrian.

'She thinks!' said the baronet.

The delicate question how she was to treat her uncle, he settled generously. Farmer Blaize should come up to Raynham when he would: Lucy must visit him at least three times a week. He had Farmer Blaize and Mrs. Berry to study, and really excellent Aphorisms sprang from the plain human bases this natural couple presented.

'It will do us no harm,' he thought, 'some of the honest blood of the soil in our veins.' And he was

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content in musing on the parentage of the little cradled boy. A common sight for those who had the entry to the library was the baronet cherishing the hand of his daughter-in-law.

So Richard was crossing the sea, and hearts at Raynham were beating quicker measures as the minutes progressed. That night he would be with them. Sir Austin gave Lucy a longer, warmer salute when she came down to breakfast in the morning. Mrs. Berry waxed thrice amorous. 'It's your second bridals, ye sweet livin' widow!' she said. 'Thanks be the Lord! it's the same man too! and a baby over the bed-post,' she appended seriously.

'Strange,' Berry declared it to be, 'strange I feel none o' this to my Berry now. All my feelin's o' love seem t' have gone into you two sweet chicks.'

In fact, the faithless male Berry complained of being treated badly, and affected a superb jealousy of the baby; but the good dame told him that if he suffered at all he suffered his due. Berry's position was decidedly uncomfortable. It could not be concealed from the lower household that he had a wife in the establishment, and for the complications this gave rise to, his wife would not legitimately console him. Lucy did intercede, but Mrs. Berry was obdurate. She averred she would not give up the child till he was weaned. 'Then, perhaps,' she said prospectively. 'You see I ain't se soft as you thought for.'

'You're a very unkind, vindictive old woman,' said Lucy.

'Belike I am,' Mrs. Berry was proud to agree. We like a new character, now and then. Berry had delayed too long.

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Were it not notorious that the straitlaced prudish dare not listen to the natural chaste, certain things Mrs. Berry thought it adviseable to impart to the young wife with regard to Berry's infidelity, and the charity women should have toward sinful men, might here be reproduced. Enough that she thought proper to broach the matter, and cite her own Christian sentiments, now that she was indifferent in some degree.

Oily calm is on the sea. At Raynham they look up at the sky and speculate that Richard is approaching fairly speeded. He comes to throw himself on his darling's mercy. Lucy irradiated over forest and sea, tempest and peace—to her the hero comes humbly. Great is that day when we see our folly! Ripton and he were the friends of old. Richard encouraged him to talk of the two he could be eloquent on, and Ripton, whose secret vanity was in his powers of speech, never tired of enumerating Lucy's virtues, and the peculiar attributes of the baby.

'She did not say a word against me, Rip?'

'Against you, Richard! The moment she knew she was to be a mother, she thought of nothing but her duty to the child. She's one who can't think of herself.'

'You've seen her at Raynham, Rip?'

'Yes, once. They asked me down. And your father's so fond of her—I'm sure he thinks no woman like her, and he's right. She is so lovely, and so good.'

Richard was too full of blame of himself to blame his father: too British to expose his emotions. Ripton divined how deep and changed they were by his manner. He had cast aside the hero, and however

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Ripton had obeyed him and looked up to him in the heroic time, he loved him tenfold now. He told his friend how much Lucy's mere womanly sweetness and excellence had done for him, and Richard contrasted his own profitless extravagance with the patient beauty of his dear home-angel. He was not one to take her on the easy terms that offered. There was that to do which made his cheek burn as he thought of it, but he was going to do it, even though it lost her to him. Just to see her and kneel to her was joy sufficient to sustain him, and warm his blood in the prospect. They marked the white cliffs growing over the water. Nearer, the sun made them lustrous. Houses and people seemed to welcome the wild youth to common-sense, simplicity, and home.

They were in town by mid-day. Richard had a momentary idea of not driving to his hotel for letters. After a short debate he determined to go there. The porter said he had two letters for Mr. Richard Feverel —one had been waiting some time. He went to the box and fetched them. The first Richard opened was from Lucy, and as he read it, Ripton observed the colour deepen on his face, while a quivering smile played about his mouth. He opened the other indifferently. It began without any form of address. Richard's forehead darkened at the signature. This letter was in a sloping feminine hand, and flourished with light strokes all over, like a field of the bearded barley. Thus it ran:—

'I know you are in a rage with me because I would not consent to ruin you, you foolish fellow. What do you call it? Going to that unpleasant place together.

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Thank you, my milliner is not ready yet, and I want to make a good appearance when I do go. I suppose I shall have to some day. Your health, Sir Richard. Now let me speak to you seriously. *Go home to your wife at once.* But I know the sort of fellow you are, and I must be plain with you. Did I ever say I loved you? You may hate me as much as you please, but I will save you from being a fool.

'Now listen to me. You know my relations with Mount. *That beast Brayder* offered to pay all my debts and set me afloat, if I would keep you in town. I declare on my honour I had no idea why, and I did not agree to it. But you were such a handsome fellow —I noticed you in the Park before I heard a word of you. But then you fought shy—you were just as tempting as a girl. You *stung* me. Do you know what that is? I would make you care for me, and we know how it ended, without any intention of mine, I *swear*. I'd have cut off my hand rather than do you any harm, upon my honour. Circumstances! Then I saw it was all up between us. Brayder came and began to chaff about you. I dealt the animal a stroke on the face with my riding-whip—I shut him up pretty quick. Do you think I would let a man speak about you?—I was going to swear. You see I remember Dick's lessons. O my God! I do feel unhappy.—Brayder offered me money. Go and think I took it, if you like. What do I care what anybody thinks! Something that blackguard said made me suspicious. I went down to the Isle of Wight where Mount was, and your wife was just gone with an old lady who came and took her away. I should so have liked to see her. You said, you remember, she would take me

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as a sister, and treat me—I laughed at it then. My God! how I could cry now, if water did any good to a *devil*, as you politely call poor me. I called at your house and saw your man-servant, who said Mount had just been there. In a minute it struck me. I was sure Mount was after a woman, but it never struck me that woman was your wife. Then I saw why they wanted me to keep you away. I went to Brayder. You know how I hate him. I made love to the man to get it out of him. Richard! my word of honour, they have planned to carry her off, if Mount finds he cannot seduce her. Talk of devils! He's one; but he is not so bad as Brayder. I cannot forgive a mean dog his villany.

'Now after this, I am quite sure you are too much of a man to stop away from her another moment. I have no more to say. I suppose we shall not see each other again, so good-bye, Dick! I fancy I hear you cursing me. Why can't you feel like other men on the subject? But if you were like the rest of them I should not have cared for you a farthing. I have not worn lilac since I saw you last. I'll be buried in your colour, Dick. That will not offend you—will it?

'You are not going to believe I took the money? If I thought you thought that—it makes me *feel* like a devil only to fancy you think it.

'The first time you meet Brayder, *cane him publicly*.

'Adieu! Say it's because you don't like his face. I suppose devils must not say *Adieu*. Here's plain old good-bye, then, between you and me. Good-bye, dear Dick! You won't think that of me?

'May I eat dry bread to the day of my death if I took or ever will touch a scrap of their money. BELLA.'

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Richard folded up the letter silently.

'Jump into the cab,' he said to Ripton.

'Anything the matter, Richard?'

'No.'

The driver received directions. Richard sat without speaking. His friend knew that face. He asked whether there was bad news in the letter. For answer, he had the lie circumstantial. He ventured to remark that they were going the wrong way.

'It's the right way,' cried Richard, and his jaws were hard and square, and his eyes looked heavy and full.

Ripton said no more, but thought.

The cabman pulled up at a Club. A gentleman, in whom Ripton recognized the Hon. Peter Brayder, was just then swinging a leg over his horse, with one foot in the stirrup. Hearing his name called, the Hon. Peter turned about, and stretched an affable hand.

'Is Mountfalcon in town?' said Richard, taking the horse's reins instead of the gentlemanly hand. His voice and aspect were quite friendly.

'Mount?' Brayder replied, curiously watching the action; 'yes. He's off this evening.'

'He *is* in town?' Richard released his horse. 'I want to see him. Where is he?'

The young man looked pleasant: that which might have aroused Brayder's suspicions was an old affair in parasitical register by this time. 'Want to see him? What about?' he said carelessly, and gave the address.

'By the way,' he sang out, 'we thought of putting your name down, Feverel.' He indicated the lofty structure. 'What do you say?'

Richard nodded back to him, crying, 'Hurry.'

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Brayder returned the nod, and those who promenaded the district soon beheld his body in elegant motion to the stepping of his well-earned horse.

'What do you want to see Lord Mountfalcon for, Richard?' said Ripton.

'I just want to see him,' Richard replied.

Ripton was left in the cab at the door of my lord's residence. He had to wait there a space of about ten minutes, when Richard returned with a clearer visage, though somewhat heated. He stood outside the cab, and Ripton was conscious of being examined by those strong grey eyes. As clear as speech he understood them to say to him, 'You won't do,' but which of the many things on earth he would not do for he was at loss to think.

'Go down to Raynham, Ripton. Say I shall be there to-night certainly. Don't bother me with questions. Drive off at once. Or wait. Get another cab. I'll take this.'

Ripton was ejected, and found himself standing alone in the street. As he was on the point of rushing after the galloping cab-horse to get a word of elucidation, he heard some one speak behind him.

'You are Feverel's friend?'

Ripton had an eye for lords. An ambrosial footman, standing at the open door of Lord Mountfalcon's house, and a gentleman standing on the door-step, told him that he was addressed by that nobleman. He was requested to step into the house. When they were alone, Lord Mountfalcon, slightly ruffled, said: 'Feverel has insulted me grossly. I must meet him, of course. It's a piece of infernal folly!—I suppose he is not quite mad?'

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Ripton's only definite answer was a gasping iteration of 'My lord.'

My lord resumed: 'I am perfectly guiltless of offending him, as far as I know. In fact, I had a friendship for him. Is he liable to fits of this sort of thing?'

Not yet at conversation-point, Ripton stammered: 'Fits, my lord?'

'Ah!' went the other, eyeing Ripton in lordly cognizant style. 'You know nothing of this business perhaps?'

Ripton said he did not.

'Have you any influence with him?'

'Not much, my lord. Only now and then—a little.'

'You are not in the Army?'

The question was quite unnecessary. Ripton confessed to the law, and my lord did not look surprised.

'I will not detain you,' he said, distantly bowing.

Ripton gave him a commoner's obeisance; but getting to the door, the sense of the matter enlightened him.

'It 's a duel, my lord?'

'No help for it, if his friends don't shut him up in Bedlam between this and to-morrow morning.'

Of all horrible things a duel was the worst in Ripton's imagination. He stood holding the handle of the door, revolving this last chapter of calamity suddenly opened where happiness had promised.

'A duel! but he won't, my lord,—he mustn't fight, my lord.'

'He must come on the ground,' said my lord positively.

Ripton ejaculated unintelligible stuff. Finally Lord Mountfalcon said: 'I went out of my way, sir, in

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speaking to you. I saw you from the window. Your friend is mad. Deuced methodical, I admit, but mad. I have particular reasons to wish not to injure the young man, and if an apology is to be got out of him when we 're on the ground, I 'll take it, and we 'll stop the damned scandal, if possible. You understand? I 'm the insulted party, and I shall only require of him to use formal words of excuse to come to an amicable settlement. Let him just say he regrets it. Now, sir,' the nobleman spoke with considerable earnestness, 'should anything happen—I have the honour to be known to Mrs. Feverel—and I beg you will tell her. I very particularly desire you to let her know that I was not to blame.'

Mountfalcon rang the bell, and bowed him out. With this on his mind Ripton hurried down to those who were waiting in joyful trust at Raynham.

CHAPTER XLIV

The Last Scene

The watch consulted by Hippias alternately with his pulse, in occult calculation hideous to mark, said half-past eleven on the midnight. Adrian, wearing a composedly amused expression on his dimpled plump face, —held slightly sideways, aloof from paper and pen,— sat writing at the library table. Round the baronet's chair, in a semicircle, were Lucy, Lady Blandish, Mrs. Doria, and Ripton, that very ill bird at Raynham. They were silent as those who question the flying minutes. Ripton had said that Richard was sure to

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come; but the feminine eyes reading him ever and anon, had gathered matter for disquietude, which increased as time sped. Sir Austin persisted in his habitual air of speculative repose.

Remote as he appeared from vulgar anxiety, he was the first to speak and betray his state.

'Pray, put up that watch. Impatience serves nothing,' he said, half-turning hastily to his brother behind him.

Hippias relinquished his pulse and mildly groaned: 'It's no nightmare, this!'

His remark was unheard, and the bearing of it remained obscure. Adrian's pen made a louder flourish on his manuscript; whether in commiseration or infernal glee, none might say.

'What are you writing?' the baronet inquired testily of Adrian, after a pause; twitched, it may be, by a sort of jealousy of the wise youth's coolness.

'Do I disturb you, sir?' rejoined Adrian. 'I am engaged on a portion of a Proposal for uniting the Empires and Kingdoms of Europe under one Paternal Head, on the model of the ever-to-be-admired and lamented Holy Roman. This treats of the management of Youths and Maids, and of certain magisterial functions connected therewith. "It is decreed that these officers be all and every men of science," etc.' And Adrian cheerily drove his pen afresh.

Mrs. Doria took Lucy's hand, mutely addressing encouragement to her, and Lucy brought as much of a smile as she could command to reply with.

'I fear we must give him up to-night,' observed Lady Blandish.

'If he said he would come, he will come,' Sir Austin

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interjected. Between him and the lady there was something of a contest secretly going on. He was conscious that nothing save perfect success would now hold this self-emancipating mind. She had seen him through.

'He declared to me he would be certain to come,' said Ripton; but he could look at none of them as he said it, for he was growing aware that Richard might have deceived him, and was feeling like a black conspirator against their happiness. He determined to tell the baronet what he knew, if Richard did not come by twelve.

'What is the time?' he asked Hippias in a modest voice.

'Time for me to be in bed,' growled Hippias, as if everybody present had been treating him badly.

Mrs. Berry came in to apprise Lucy that she was wanted above. She quietly rose. Sir Austin kissed her on the forehead, saying: 'You had better not come down again, my child.' She kept her eyes on him. 'Oblige me by retiring for the night,' he added. Lucy shook their hands, and went out, accompanied by Mrs. Doria.

'This agitation will be bad for the child,' he said, speaking to himself aloud.

Lady Blandish remarked: 'I think she might just as well have returned. She will not sleep.'

'She will control herself for the child's sake.'

'You ask too much of her.'

'Of her, not,' he emphasized.

It was twelve o'clock when Hippias shut his watch, and said with vehemence: 'I'm convinced my circulation gradually and steadily decreases!'

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'Going back to the pre-Harvey period!' murmured Adrian as he wrote.

Sir Austin and Lady Blandish knew well that any comment would introduce them to the interior of his machinery, the external view of which was sufficiently harrowing; so they maintained a discreet reserve. Taking it for acquiescence in his deplorable condition, Hippias resumed despairingly: 'It's a fact. I've brought you to see that. No one can be more moderate than I am, and yet I get worse. My system is organically sound—I believe: I do every possible thing, and yet I get worse. Nature never forgives! I'll go to bed.'

The Dyspepsy departed unconsoled.

Sir Austin took up his brother's thought: 'I suppose nothing short of a miracle helps us when we have offended her.'

'Nothing short of a quack satisfies us,' said Adrian, applying wax to an envelope of official dimensions.

Ripton sat accusing his soul of cowardice while they talked; haunted by Lucy's last look at him. He got up his courage presently and went round to Adrian, who, after a few whispered words, deliberately rose and accompanied him out of the room, shrugging. When they had gone, Lady Blandish said to the baronet: 'He is not coming.'

'To-morrow, then, if not to-night,' he replied. 'But I say he will come to-night.'

'You do really wish to see him united to his wife?'

The question made the baronet raise his brows with some displeasure.

'Can you ask me?'

'I mean,' said the ungenerous woman, 'your System

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will require no further sacrifices from either of them?'

When he did answer, it was to say: 'I think her altogether a superior person. I confess I should scarcely have hoped to find one like her.'

'Admit that your science does not accomplish everything.'

'No: it was presumptuous—beyond a certain point,' said the baronet, meaning deep things.

Lady Blandish eyed him. 'Ah me!' she sighed, 'if we would always be true to our own wisdom!'

'You are very singular to-night, Emmeline.' Sir Austin stopped his walk in front of her.

In truth, was she not unjust? Here was an offending son freely forgiven. Here was a young woman of humble birth freely accepted into his family and permitted to stand upon her qualities. Who would have done more—or as much? This lady, for instance, had the case been hers, would have fought it. All the people of position that he was acquainted with would have fought it, and that without feeling it so peculiarly. But while the baronet thought this, he did not think of the exceptional education his son had received. He took the common ground of fathers, forgetting his System when it was absolutely on trial. False to his son it could not be said that he had been: false to his System he was. Others saw it plainly, but he had to learn his lesson by and by.

Lady Blandish gave him her face; then stretched her hand to the table, saying, 'Well! well!' She fingered a half-opened parcel lying there, and drew forth a little book she recognized. 'Ha! what is this?' she said.

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'Benson returned it this morning,' he informed her. 'The stupid fellow took it away with him—by mischance, I am bound to believe.'

It was nothing other than the old Note-book. Lady Blandish turned over the leaves, and came upon the later jottings.

She read: 'A maker of Proverbs—what is he but a narrow mind the mouthpiece of narrower?'

'I do not agree with that,' she observed. He was in no humour for argument.

'Was your humility feigned when you wrote it?'

He merely said: 'Consider the sort of minds influenced by set sayings. A proverb is the half-way-house to an Idea, I conceive; and the majority rest there content: can the keeper of such a house be flattered by his company?'

She felt her feminine intelligence swaying under him again. There must be greatness in a man who could thus speak of his own special and admirable aptitude.

Further she read, 'Which is the coward among us?—*He who sneers at the failings of Humanity!*'

'Oh! that is true! How much I admire that!' cried the dark-eyed dame as she beamed intellectual raptures.

Another Aphorism seemed closely to apply to him: 'There is no more grievous sight, as there is no greater perversion, than a wise man at the mercy of his feelings.'

'He must have written it,' she thought, 'when he had himself for an example—strange man that he is!'

Lady Blandish was still inclined to submission, though decidedly insubordinate. She had once been fairly conquered: but if what she reverenced as a great mind could conquer her, it must be a great man that

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should hold her captive. The Autumn Primrose blooms for the loftiest manhood; is a vindictive flower in lesser hands. Nevertheless Sir Austin had only to be successful, and this lady's allegiance was his for ever. The trial was at hand.

She said again: 'He is not coming to-night,' and the baronet, on whose visage a contemplative pleased look had been rising for a minute past, quietly added: 'He is come.'

Richard's voice was heard in the hall.

There was commotion all over the house at the return of the young heir. Berry, seizing every possible occasion to approach his Bessy now that her involuntary coldness had enhanced her value—'Such is men!' as the soft woman reflected—Berry ascended to her and delivered the news in pompous tones and wheedling gestures. 'The best word you 've spoke for many a day,' says she, and leaves him unfee'd, in an attitude, to hurry and pour bliss into Lucy's ears.

'Lord be praised!' she entered the adjoining room exclaiming, 'we're goin' to be happy at last. They men have come to their senses. I could cry to your Virgin and kiss your Cross, you sweet!'

'Hush!' Lucy admonished her, and crooned over the child on her knees. The tiny open hands, full of sleep, clutched; the large blue eyes started awake; and his mother, all trembling and palpitating, knowing, but thirsting to hear it, covered him with her tresses, and tried to still her frame, and rocked, and sang low, interdicting even a whisper from bursting Mrs. Berry.

Richard had come. He was under his father's roof, in the old home that had so soon grown foreign to him.

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He stood close to his wife and child. He might embrace them both: and now the fulness of his anguish and the madness of the thing he had done smote the young man: now first he tasted hard earthly misery.

Had not God spoken to him in the tempest? Had not the finger of heaven directed him homeward? And he had come: here he stood: congratulations were thick in his ears: the cup of happiness was held to him, and he was invited to drink of it. Which was the dream? his work for the morrow, or this? But for a leaden load that he felt like a bullet in his breast, he might have thought the morrow with death sitting on it was the dream. Yes; he was awake. Now first the cloud of phantasms cleared away: he beheld his real life, and the colours of true human joy: and on the morrow perhaps he was to close his eyes on them. That leaden bullet dispersed all unrealities.

They stood about him in the hall, his father, Lady Blandish, Mrs. Doria, Adrian, Ripton; people who had known him long. They shook his hand: they gave him greetings he had never before understood the worth of or the meaning. Now that he did they mocked him. There was Mrs. Berry in the background bobbing, there was Martin Berry bowing, there was Tom Bakewell grinning. Somehow he loved the sight of these better.

'Ah, my old Penelope!' he said, breaking through the circle of his relatives to go to her. 'Tom! how are you?'

'Bless ye, my Mr. Richard,' whimpered Mrs. Berry, and whispered rosily, 'all's agreeable now. She's waiting up in bed for ye, like a new-born.'

The person who betrayed most agitation was Mrs.

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Doria. She held close to him, and eagerly studied his face and every movement, as one accustomed to masks. 'You are pale, Richard?' He pleaded exhaustion. 'What detained you, dear?' 'Business,' he said. She drew him imperiously apart from the others. 'Richard! is it over?' He asked what she meant. 'The dreadful duel, Richard.' He looked darkly. 'Is it over? is it done, Richard?' Getting no immediate answer, she continued—and such was her agitation that the words were shaken by pieces from her mouth: 'Don't pretend not to understand me, Richard! Is it over? Are you going to die the death of my child—Clare's death? Is not one in a family enough? Think of your dear young wife—we love her so!—your child!—your father! Will you kill us all?'

Mrs. Doria had chanced to overhear a trifle of Ripton's communication to Adrian, and had built thereon with the dark forces of a stricken soul.

Wondering how this woman could have divined it, Richard calmly said: 'It's arranged—the matter you allude to.'

'Indeed! truly, dear?'

'Yes.'

'Tell me'—but he broke away from her, saying: 'You shall hear the particulars to-morrow,' and she, not alive to double meaning just then, allowed him to leave her.

He had eaten nothing for twelve hours, and called for food, but he would take only dry bread and claret, which was served on a tray in the library. He said, without any show of feeling, that he must eat before he saw the younger hope of Raynham: so there he sat, breaking bread, and eating great mouthfuls, and wash-

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ing them down with wine, talking of what they would. His father's studious mind felt itself years behind him, he was so completely altered. He had the precision of speech, the bearing of a man of thirty. Indeed he had all that the necessity for cloaking an infinite misery gives. But let things be as they might, he was *there*. For one night in his life Sir Austin's perspective of the future was bounded by the night.

'Will you go to your wife now?' he had asked, and Richard had replied with a strange indifference. The baronet thought it better that their meeting should be private, and sent word for Lucy to wait upstairs. The others perceived that father and son should now be left alone. Adrian went up to him, and said: 'I can no longer witness this painful sight, so Good-night, Sir Famish! You may cheat yourself into the belief that you've made a meal, but depend upon it your progeny—and it threatens to be numerous—will cry aloud and rue the day. Nature never forgives! A lost dinner can never be replaced! Good-night, my dear boy. And here—oblige me by taking this,' he handed Richard the enormous envelope containing what he had written that evening. 'Credentials!' he exclaimed humorously, slapping Richard on the shoulder. Ripton heard also the words 'propagator—species,' but had no idea of their import. The wise youth looked: You see we've made matters all right for you here, and quitted the room on that unusual gleam of earnestness.

Richard shook his hand, and Ripton's. Then Lady Blandish said her good-night, praising Lucy, and promising to pray for their mutual happiness. The two men who knew what was hanging over him,

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spoke together outside. Ripton was for getting a positive assurance that the duel would not be fought, but Adrian said: 'Time enough to-morrow. He's safe enough while he's here. I'll stop it to-morrow': ending with banter of Ripton and allusions to his adventures with Miss Random, which must, Adrian said, have led him into many affairs of the sort. Certainly Richard was there, and while he was there he must be safe. So thought Ripton, and went to his bed. Mrs. Doria deliberated likewise, and likewise thought him safe while he was there. For once in her life she thought it better not to trust to her instinct, for fear of useless disturbance where peace should be. So she said not a syllable of it to her brother. She only looked more deeply into Richard's eyes, as she kissed him, praising Lucy. 'I have found a second daughter in her, dear. Oh! may you both be happy!'

They all praised Lucy, now. His father commenced the moment they were alone. 'Poor Helen! Your wife has been a great comfort to her, Richard. I think Helen must have sunk without her. So lovely a young person, possessing mental faculty, and a conscience for her duties, I have never before met.'

He wished to gratify his son by these eulogies of Lucy, and some hours back he would have succeeded. Now it had the contrary effect.

'You compliment me on my choice, sir?'

Richard spoke sedately, but the irony was perceptible, and he could speak no other way, his bitterness was so intense.

'I think you very fortunate,' said his father.

Sensitive to tone and manner as he was, his ebulli-

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tion of paternal feeling was frozen. Richard did not approach him. He leaned against the chimney-piece, glancing at the floor, and lifting his eyes only when he spoke. Fortunate! very fortunate! As he revolved his later history, and remembered how clearly he had seen that his father must love Lucy if he but knew her, and remembered his efforts to persuade her to come with him, a sting of miserable rage blackened his brain. But could he blame that gentle soul? Whom could he blame? Himself? Not utterly. His Father? Yes, and no. The blame was here, the blame was there: it was everywhere and nowhere, and the young man cast it on the Fates, and looked angrily at heaven, and grew reckless.

'Richard,' said his father, coming close to him, 'it is late to-night. I do not wish Lucy to remain in expectation longer, or I should have explained myself to you thoroughly, and I think—or at least hope—you would have justified me. I had cause to believe that you had not only violated my confidence, but grossly deceived me. It was not so, I now know. I was mistaken. Much of our misunderstanding has resulted from that mistake. But you were married—a boy; you knew nothing of the world, little of yourself. To save you in after-life—for there is a period when mature men and women who have married young are more impelled to temptation than in youth,—though not so exposed to it,—to save you, I say, I decreed that you should experience self-denial and learn something of your fellows of both sexes, before settling into a state that must have been otherwise precarious, however excellent the woman who is your mate. My System with you would have been otherwise

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imperfect, and you would have felt the effects of it. It is over now. You are a man. The dangers to which your nature was open are, I trust, at an end. I wish you to be happy, and I give you both my blessing, and pray God to conduct and strengthen you both.'

Sir Austin's mind was unconscious of not having spoken devoutly. True or not, his words were idle to his son: his talk of dangers over, and happiness, mockery.

Richard coldly took his father's extended hand.

'We will go to her,' said the baronet. 'I will leave you at her door.'

Not moving: looking fixedly at his father with a hard face on which the colour rushed, Richard said: 'A husband who has been unfaithful to his wife may go to her there, sir?'

It was horrible, it was cruel: Richard knew that. He wanted no advice on such a matter, having fully resolved what to do. Yesterday he would have listened to his father, and blamed himself alone, and done what was to be done humbly before God and her: now in the recklessness of his misery he had as little pity for any other soul as for his own. Sir Austin's brows were deep drawn down.

'What did you say, Richard?'

Clearly his intelligence had taken it, but this—the worst he could hear—this that he had dreaded once and doubted, and smoothed over, and cast aside—could it be?

Richard said: 'I told you all but the very words when we last parted. What else do you think would have kept me from her?'

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Angered at his callous aspect, his father cried: 'What brings you to her now?'

'That will be between us two,' was the reply.

Sir Austin fell into his chair. Meditation was impossible. He spoke from a wrathful heart: 'You will not dare to take her without——'

'No, sir,' Richard interrupted him, 'I shall not. Have no fear.'

'Then you did not love your wife?'

'Did I not?' A smile passed faintly over Richard's face.

'Did you care so much for this—this other person?'

'So much? If you ask me whether I had affection for her, I can say I had none.'

O base human nature! Then how? then why? A thousand questions rose in the baronet's mind. Bessy Berry could have answered them every one.

'Poor child! poor child!' he apostrophized Lucy, pacing the room. Thinking of her, knowing her deep love for his son—her true forgiving heart—it seemed she should be spared this misery.

He proposed to Richard to spare her. Vast is the distinction between women and men in this one sin, he said, and supported it with physical and moral citations. His argument carried him so far, that to hear him one would have imagined he thought the sin in men small indeed. His words were idle.

'She must know it,' said Richard sternly. 'I will go to her now, sir, if you please.'

Sir Austin detained him, expostulated, contradicted himself, confounded his principles, made nonsense of all his theories. He could not induce his son to waver in his resolve. Ultimately, their good-night

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being interchanged, he understood that the happiness of Raynham depended on Lucy's mercy. He had no fears of her sweet heart, but it was a strange thing to have come to. On which should the accusation fall—on science, or on human nature?

He remained in the library pondering over the question, at times breathing contempt for his son, and again seized with unwonted suspicion of his own wisdom: troubled, much to be pitied, even if he deserved that blow from his son which had plunged him into wretchedness.

Richard went straight to Tom Bakewell, roused the heavy sleeper, and told him to have his mare saddled and waiting at the park gates East within an hour. Tom's nearest approach to a hero was to be a faithful slave to his master, and in doing this he acted to his conception of that high and glorious character. He got up and heroically dashed his head into cold water. 'She shall be ready, sir,' he nodded.

'Tom! if you don't see me back here at Raynham, your money will go on being paid to you.'

'Rather see you than the money, Mr. Richard,' said Tom.

'And you will always watch and see no harm comes to her, Tom.'

'Mrs. Richard, sir?' Tom stared. 'God bless me, Mr. Richard——'

'No questions. You 'll do what I say.'

'Ay, sir; that I will. Did 'n Isle o' Wight.'

The very name of the Island shocked Richard's blood, and he had to walk up and down before he could knock at Lucy's door. That infamous conspiracy to which he owed his degradation and misery

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scarce left him the feelings of a man when he thought of it.

The soft beloved voice responded to his knock. He opened the door, and stood before her. Lucy was half-way toward him. In the moment that passed ere she was in his arms, he had time to observe the change in her. He had left her a girl: he beheld a woman—a blooming woman: for pale at first, no sooner did she see him than the colour was rich and deep on her face and neck and bosom half shown through the loose dressing-robe, and the sense of her exceeding beauty made his heart thump and his eyes swim.

'My darling!' each cried, and they clung together, and her mouth was fastened on his.

They spoke no more. His soul was drowned in her kiss. Supporting her, whose strength was gone, he, almost as weak as she, hung over her, and clasped her closer, closer, till they were as one body, and in the oblivion her lips put upon him he was free to the bliss of her embrace. Heaven granted him that. He placed her in a chair and knelt at her feet with both arms around her. Her bosom heaved; her eyes never quitted him: their light as the light on a rolling wave. This young creature, commonly so frank and straightforward, was broken with bashfulness in her husband's arms—womanly bashfulness on the torrent of womanly love; tenfold more seductive than the bashfulness of girlhood. Terrible tenfold the loss of her seemed now, as distantly—far on the horizon of memory—the fatal truth returned to him.

Lose her? lose this? He looked up as if to ask God to confirm it.

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The same sweet blue eyes! the eyes that he had often seen in the dying glories of evening; on him they dwelt, shifting, and fluttering, and glittering, but constant: the light of them as the light on a rolling wave.

And true to him! true, good, glorious, as the angels of heaven! And his she was! a woman—his wife! The temptation to take her, and be dumb, was all powerful: the wish to die against her bosom so strong as to be the prayer of his vital forces. Again he strained her to him, but this time it was as a robber grasps priceless treasure—with exultation and defiance. One instant of this. Lucy, whose pure tenderness had now surmounted the first wild passion of their meeting, bent back her head from her surrendered body, and said almost voicelessly, her underlids wistfully quivering: 'Come and see him—baby'; and then in great hope of the happiness she was going to give her husband, and share with him, and in tremour and doubt of what his feelings would be, she blushed, and her brows worked: she tried to throw off the strangeness of a year of separation, misunderstanding, and uncertainty.

'Darling! come and see him. He is here.' She spoke more clearly, though no louder.

Richard had released her, and she took his hand, and he suffered himself to be led to the other side of the bed. His heart began rapidly throbbing at the sight of a little rosy-curtained cot covered with lace like milky summer cloud.

It seemed to him he would lose his manhood if he looked on that child's face.

'Stop!' he cried suddenly.

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Lucy turned first to him, and then to her infant, fearing it should have been disturbed.

'Lucy, come back.'

'What is it, darling?' said she, in alarm at his voice and the grip he had unwittingly given her hand.

O God! what an Ordeal was this! that to-morrow be must face death, perhaps die and be torn from his darling—his wife and his child; and that ere he went forth, ere he could dare to see his child and lean his head reproachfully on his young wife's breast—for the last time, it might be—he must stab her to the heart, shatter the image she held of him.

'Lucy!' She saw him wrenched with agony, and her own face took the whiteness of his—she bending forward to him, all her faculties strung to hearing.

He held her two hands that she might look on him and not spare the horrible wound he was going to lay open to her eyes.

'Lucy. Do you know why I came to you to-night?'

She moved her lips repeating his words.

'Lucy. Have you guessed why I did not come before?'

Her head shook widened eyes.

'Lucy. I did not come because I was not worthy of my wife. Do you understand?'

'Darling,' she faltered plaintively, and hung crouching under him, 'What have I done to make you angry with me?'

'O beloved!' cried he, the tears bursting out of his eyes. 'O beloved!' was all he could say, kissing her hands passionately.

She waited, reassured, but in terror.

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'Lucy. I stayed away from you—I could not come to you, because . . . I dared not come to you, my wife, my beloved! I could not come because I was a coward: because—hear me—this was the reason: I have broken my marriage oath.'

Again her lips moved. She caught at a dim fleshless meaning in them. 'But you love me? Richard! My husband! you love me?'

'Yes. I have never loved, I never shall love, woman but you.'

'Darling! Kiss me.'

'Have you understood what I have told you?'

'Kiss me,' she said.

He did not join lips. 'I have come to you to-night to ask your forgiveness.'

Her answer was: 'Kiss me.'

'Can you forgive a man so base?'

'But you love me, Richard?'

'Yes: that I can say before God. I love you, and I have betrayed you, and am unworthy of you—not worthy to touch your hand, to kneel at your feet, to breathe the same air with you.'

Her eyes shone brilliantly. 'You love me! you love me, darling!' And as one who has sailed through dark fears into daylight, she said: 'My husband! my darling! you will never leave me? We never shall be parted again?'

He drew his breath painfully. To smooth her face growing rigid with fresh fears at his silence, he met her mouth. That kiss in which she spoke what her soul had to say, calmed her, and she smiled happily from it, and in her manner reminded him of his first vision of her on the summer morning in the field of

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the meadow-sweet. He held her to him, and thought then of a holier picture: of Mother and Child: of the sweet wonders of life she had made real to him.

Had he not absolved his conscience? At least the pangs to come made him think so. He now followed her leading hand. Lucy whispered: 'You mustn't disturb him — mustn't touch him, dear!' and with dainty fingers drew off the covering to the little shoulder. One arm of the child was out along the pillow, the small hand open. His baby-mouth was pouted full; the dark lashes of his eyes seemed to lie on his plump cheeks. Richard stooped lower down to him, hungering for some movement as a sign that he lived. Lucy whispered. 'He sleeps like you, Richard —one arm under his head.' Great wonder, and the stir of a grasping tenderness was in Richard. He breathed quick and soft, bending lower, till Lucy's curls, as she nestled and bent with him, rolled on the crimson quilt of the cot. A smile went up the plump cheeks: forthwith the bud of a mouth was in rapid motion. The young mother whispered, blushing: 'He 's dreaming of me,' and the simple words did more than Richard's eyes to make him see what was. Then Lucy began to hum and buzz sweet baby-language, and some of the tiny fingers stirred, and he made as if to change his cosy position, but reconsidered, and deferred it, with a peaceful little sigh. Lucy whispered: 'He is such a big fellow. Oh! when you see him awake he is so like you, Richard.'

He did not hear her immediately: it seemed a bit of heaven dropped there in his likeness: the more human the fact of the child grew the more heavenly it seemed. His son! his child! should he ever see him awake?

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At the thought, he took the words that had been spoken, and started from the dream he had been in. 'Will he wake soon, Lucy?'

'Oh no! not yet, dear: not for hours. I would have kept him awake for you, but he was *so* sleepy.'

Richard stood back from the cot. He thought that if he saw the eyes of his boy, and had him once on his heart, he never should have force to leave him. Then he looked down on him, again struggled to tear himself away. Two natures warred in his bosom, or it may have been the Magian Conflict still going on. He had come to see his child once and to make peace with his wife before it should be too late. Might he not stop with them? Might he not relinquish that devilish pledge? Was not divine happiness here offered to him?—If foolish Ripton had not delayed to tell him of his interview with Mountfalcon all might have been well. But pride said it was impossible. And then injury spoke. For why was he thus base and spotted to the darling of his love? A mad pleasure in the prospect of wreaking vengeance on the villain who had laid the trap for him, once more blackened his brain. If he would stay he could not. So he resolved, throwing the burden on Fate. The struggle was over, but oh, the pain! Lucy beheld the tears streaming hot from his face on the child's cot. She marvelled at such excess of emotion. But when his chest heaved, and the extremity of mortal anguish appeared to have seized him, her heart sank, and she tried to get him in her arms. He turned away from her and went to the window. A half-moon was over the lake.

'Look!' he said, 'do you remember our rowing there one night, and we saw the shadow of the cypress?

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I wish I could have come early to-night that we might have had another row, and I have heard you sing there!'

'Darling!' said she, 'will it make you happier if I go with you now? I will.'

'No, Lucy. Lucy, you are brave!'

'Oh, no! that I'm not. I thought so once. I know I am not now.'

'Yes! to have lived—the child on your heart—and never to have uttered a complaint!—you are brave. O my Lucy! my wife! you that have made me man! I called you a coward. I remember it. I was the coward—*I* the wretched vain fool! Darling! I am going to leave you now. You are brave, and you will bear it. Listen: in two days, or three, I may be back—back for good, if you will accept me. Promise me to go to bed quietly. Kiss the child for me, and tell him his father has seen him. He will learn to speak soon. Will he soon speak, Lucy?'

Dreadful suspicion kept her speechless; she could only clutch one arm of his with both her hands.

'Going?' she presently gasped.

'For two or three days. No more—I hope.'

'To-night?'

'Yes. Now.'

'Going now? my husband!' her faculties abandoned her.

'You will be brave, my Lucy!'

'Richard! my darling husband! Going? What is it takes you from me?' But questioning no further, she fell on her knees, and cried piteously to him to stay—not to leave them. Then she dragged him to the little sleeper, and urged him to pray by his side,

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and he did, but rose abruptly from his prayer when he had muttered a few broken words—she praying on with tight strung nerves, in the faith that what she said to the interceding Mother above would be stronger than human hands on him. Nor could he go while she knelt there.

And he wavered. He had not reckoned on her terrible suffering. She came to him, quiet. 'I knew you would remain.' And taking his hand, innocently fondling it: 'Am I so changed from her he loved? You will not leave me, dear?' But dread returned, and the words quivered as she spoke them.

He was almost vanquished by the loveliness of her womanhood. She drew his hand to her heart, and strained it there under one breast. 'Come: lie on my heart,' she murmured with a smile of holy sweetness.

He wavered more, and drooped to her, but summoning the powers of hell, kissed her suddenly, cried the words of parting, and hurried to the door. It was over in an instant. She cried out his name, clinging to him wildly, and was adjured to be brave, for he would be dishonoured if he did not go. Then she was shaken off.

Mrs. Berry was aroused by an unusual prolonged wailing of the child, which showed that no one was comforting it, and failing to get any answer to her applications for admittance, she made bold to enter. There she saw Lucy, the child in her lap, sitting on the floor senseless:—she had taken it from its sleep and tried to follow her husband with it as her strongest appeal to him, and had fainted.

'Oh my! Oh my!' Mrs. Berry moaned, 'and I just now thinkin' they was so happy!'

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Warming and caressing the poor infant, she managed by degrees to revive Lucy, and heard what had brought her to that situation.

'Go to his father,' said Mrs. Berry. 'Ta-te-tiddle-te-heighty-O! Go, my love, and every horse in Raynham shall be out after 'm. This is what men brings us to! Heighty-oighty-iddlety-Ah! Or you take blessed baby, and I'll go.'

The baronet himself knocked at the door. 'What is this?' he said. 'I heard a noise and a step descend.'

'It's Mr. Richard have gone, Sir Austin! have gone from his wife and babe! Rum-te-um-te-iddledy—Oh, my goodness! what sorrow's come on us!' and Mrs. Berry wept, and sang to baby, and baby cried vehemently, and Lucy, sobbing, took him and danced him and sang to him with drawn lips and tears dropping over him. And if the Scientific Humanist to the day of his death forgets the sight of those two poor true women jigging on their wretched hearts to calm the child, he must have very little of the human in him.

There was no more sleep for Raynham that night.

CHAPTER XLV

Lady Blandish to Austin Wentworth

'His ordeal is over. I have just come from his room and seen him bear the worst that could be. Return at once—he has asked for you. I can hardly write intelligibly, but I will tell you what we know.

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CHAPTER XLV
Lady Blandish to Austin Wentworth

'Two days after the dreadful night when he left us, his father heard from Ralph Morton. Richard had fought a duel in France with Lord Mountfalcon, and was lying wounded at a hamlet on the coast. His father started immediately with his poor wife, and I followed in company with his aunt and his child. The wound was not dangerous. He was shot in the side somewhere, but the ball injured no vital part. We thought all would be well. Oh! how sick I am of theories, and Systems, and the pretensions of men! There was his son lying all but dead, and the man was still unconvinced of the folly he had been guilty of. I could hardly bear the sight of his composure. I shall hate the name of Science till the day I die. Give me nothing but commonplace unpretending people!

'They were at a wretched French cabaret, smelling vilely, where we still remain, and the people try as much as they can do to compensate for our discomforts by their kindness. The French poor people are very considerate where they see suffering. I will say that for them. The doctors had not allowed his poor Lucy to go near him. She sat outside his door, and none of us dared disturb her. That was a sight for Science. His father and myself, and Mrs. Berry, were the only ones permitted to wait on him, and whenever we came out, there she sat, not speaking a word—for she had been told it would endanger his life—but she looked such awful eagerness. She had the sort of eye I fancy mad persons have. I was sure her reason was going. We did everything we could think of to comfort her. A bed was made up for her and her meals were brought to her there. Of course there was no getting her to eat. What do you suppose *his* alarm

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was fixed on? He absolutely said to me—but I have not patience to repeat his words. He thought her to blame for not *commanding* herself for the sake of her *maternal duties*. He had absolutely an idea of insisting that she should make an effort to suckle the child. I shall love that Mrs. Berry to the end of my days. I really believe she has *twice* the sense of any of us—Science and all. She asked him plainly if he wished to poison the child, and then he gave way, but with a bad grace.

'Poor man! perhaps I am hard on him. I remember that you said Richard had done wrong. Yes; well, that may be. But his father eclipsed his wrong in a greater wrong—a crime, or quite as bad; for if he deceived himself in the belief that he was acting righteously in separating husband and wife, and exposing his son as he did, I can only say that there are some who are worse than people who deliberately commit *crimes*. No doubt Science will benefit by it. They kill little animals for the sake of Science.

'We have with us Dr. Bairam, and a French physician from Dieppe, a very skilful man. It was he who told us where the real danger lay. We thought all would be well. A week had passed, and no fever supervened. We told Richard that his wife was coming to him, and he could bear to hear it. I went to her and began to circumlocute, thinking she listened—she had the same eager look. When I told her she might go in with me to see her dear husband, her features did not change. M. Després, who held her pulse at the time, told me, in a whisper, it was cerebral fever—brain fever coming on. We have talked of her since. I noticed

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CHAPTER XLV
Lady Blandish to Austin Wentworth

that though she did not seem to understand me, her bosom heaved, and she appeared to be trying to repress it, and choke something. I am sure now, from what I know of her character, that she—even in the approaches of delirium—was preventing herself from crying out. Her last hold of reason was a thought for Richard. It was against a creature like this that we plotted! I have the comfort of knowing that I did my share in helping to destroy her. Had she seen her husband a day or two before—but no! there was a new *System* to interdict that! Or had she not so violently controlled her nature as she did, I believe she might have been saved.

'He said once of a man, that his conscience was a coxcomb. Will you believe that when he saw his son's wife—poor victim! lying delirious, he could not even then see his error. You said he wished to take Providence out of God's hands. His mad self-deceit would not leave him. I am positive, that while he was standing over her, he was blaming her for not having considered the child. Indeed he made a remark to me that it was unfortunate—"disastrous," I think he said—that the child should have to be fed by hand. I dare say it is. All I pray is that this young child may be saved from him. I cannot bear to see him look on it. He does not spare himself *bodily* fatigue—but what is that? that is the vulgarest form of love. I know what you will say. You will say I have lost all charity, and I have. But I should not feel so, Austin, if I could be *quite sure* that he is an altered man even now the blow has struck him. He is reserved and simple in his speech, and his grief is evident, but I have doubts. He heard her while she was senseless call him cruel and

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harsh, and cry that she had suffered, and I saw then his mouth contract as if he had been touched. Perhaps, when he thinks, his mind will be clearer, but what he has done cannot be undone. I do not imagine he will abuse women any more. The doctor called her a "forte et belle jeune femme": and *he* said she was as noble a soul as ever God moulded clay upon. A noble soul "forte et belle"! She lies upstairs. If he can look on her and not see his *sin*, I almost fear God will never enlighten him.

'She died five days after she had been removed. The shock had utterly deranged her. I was with her. She died very quietly, breathing her last breath without pain—asking for no one—a death I should like to die.

'Her cries at one time were dreadfully loud. She screamed that she was "drowning in fire," and that her husband would not come to her to save her. We deadened the sound as much as we could, but it was impossible to prevent Richard from hearing. He knew her voice, and it produced an effect like fever on him. Whenever she called he answered. You could not hear them without weeping. Mrs. Berry sat with her, and I sat with him, and his father moved from one to the other.

'But the trial for us came when she was gone. How to communicate it to Richard—or whether to do so at all! His father consulted with us. We were quite decided that it would be madness to breathe it while he was in that state. I can admit now—as things have turned out—we were wrong. His father left us—I believe he spent the time in prayer—and then leaning on me, he went to Richard, and said in so many

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CHAPTER XLV
Lady Blandish to Austin Wentworth

words, that his Lucy was no more. I thought it must kill him. He listened, and smiled. I never saw a smile so sweet and so sad. He said he had seen her die, as if he had passed through his suffering a long time ago. He shut his eyes. I could see by the motion of his eyeballs up that he was straining his sight to some inner heaven.—I cannot go on.

'I think Richard is safe. Had we postponed the tidings, till he came to his clear senses, it must have killed him. His father was right for once, then. But if he has saved his son's body, he has given the death-blow to his heart. Richard will never be what he promised.

'A letter found on his clothes tells us the origin of the quarrel. I have had an interview with Lord M. this morning. I cannot say I think him exactly to blame: Richard forced him to fight. At least I do not select him the foremost for blame. He was deeply and sincerely affected by the calamity he has caused. Alas! he was only an instrument. Your poor aunt is utterly prostrate and talks strange things of her daughter's death. She is only happy in *drudging*. Dr. Bairam says we must under any circumstances keep her employed. Whilst she is doing something, she can chat freely, but the moment her hands are not occupied she gives me an idea that she is going into a fit.

'We expect the dear child's uncle to-day. Mr. Thompson is here. I have taken him upstairs to look at her. That poor young man has a true heart.

'Come at once. You will not be in time to see her. She will lie at Raynham. If you could you would see an angel. *He* sits by her side for hours. I can give you no description of her beauty.

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CHAPTER XLV
Lady Blandish to Austin Wentworth

'You will not delay, I know, dear Austin, and I want you, for your presence will make me more charitable than I find it possible to be. Have you noticed the expression in the eyes of blind men? That is just how Richard looks, as he lies there silent in his bed—striving to image her on his brain.'

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